

Teach Us to Pray Part 1

Greetings

Very good evening to all of you. Thank you for joining us in our Christian Education Program. We are looking at the subject of prayer. And I think this is a very important subject, brother Luzerne actually touched on prayer and gave you wonderful lessons in prayer. I just like to give my own take also on this subject, there will be a lot of overlap. There'll be some maybe new things that you will learn, but I hope overall, it will enrich your prayer life. Many people have many questions about prayer, they ask questions like why do we pray? Who do we actually pray to? And what do we pray for? How do we pray? I think these are very frequently asked questions throughout the ages. 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ had these same questions from his disciples, the disciples came to him and said, Master, Lord, would you teach us to pray? So, I think the best approach to answering your questions would be to look at the instructions given by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. So, we're going to embark on a little journey, a four parter to understand prayer, as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Opening Prayer

So, before we go further, shall we pray and ask God to teach us to pray. Father, thank You for this time, we could gather around your word. Thank you for the hunger and thirst you have placed upon your people, that they will desire to know your truth, and desire to be better prayer warriors in our lives. We pray that you will teach us by your Holy Spirit, we pray our lives, our prayers, our mindsets will be shaped by scripture, even this evening. We pray again, that you will help us to be a people who glorify you, with our lives, and also in our prayer. So, bless this time, for your own namesake, we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Why pray?

So, let's look at why pray? I think this is the number one question that we should answer. Because if you do not have a good idea why you should pray, you will not pray. But if you have a better scriptural understanding of the blessings, the benefits, and indeed the need to pray, then we will pray more and pray more eagerly and faithfully.

Why we should not pray?

So, let's look at why we should not pray. First of all, all right, so Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them. For then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 6:1) So Jesus here is saying that you do not do pious deeds before people. Now is it wrong to pray, therefore, in public? No. But the key here is in this phrase, in order to be seen by them. So, the problem here is that people can even use pious activities, like arms giving and prayer to impress others. And Jesus says, Don't ever do that. Again, he repeats in verse

five. "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues, and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others." (Matthew 6:5) Now, I don't think it's wrong to pray at street corners. It's not wrong to pray in any building. But it's wrong to do prayer in street corners, and in any building, because you love to be seen by others. So again, this is a warning that when we want to pray, or when we practice prayer, we must be clear, this is not so that we can look good before others, so that we might impress others. This is not a show, this is not theatrics. And we pray not for the audience of men, but we pray for the audience of our God. So, if we should not pray to impress people or to put up a show, then let's look at why we should pray. So this is a little bit of a discourse or this is a kind of distraction, or we're going to go a detour away from Matthew chapter six. All right, because I think the reasons for prayer are furnished elsewhere very clearly. So why do we pray?

Relationship

Number one, we pray because we want to have a healthy relationship with God. Prayer is communicating with God. And as we all know, there is no good relationship without dialogue, without communication. And as we hear from God in His Word, we respond to God in prayer. For example, in Deuteronomy, chapter four, verse seven, "For what great nation is there that has got so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call upon him?" So, Israel understands that they have God as their God because God responds to their prayer. And this is the kind of dynamics that allow us to have a healthy relationship with God. God is not disinterested, God is not aloof, but God hears the prayers of his people. And so, God gives us the privilege of prayer, that we may learn to depend on him, that we may learn and grow in our relationship with Him. I think it is a healthy thing for every Christian, to be engaged in prayer, calling on our father. I think every child calls upon their fathers, when they have needs, and when they want to talk, and when they have troubles and when they have sorrows. And it's the same for a Christian, we pour our hearts to our father because this is part of relationships.

Restedness

Now a second reason I think I see in Scripture about prayer is that it gives us restedness. Look at Philippians, chapter four, it says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6) So, what happens when we pray? Does everything turn out the way we want? Is there a guarantee that whatever I ask will always happen the way I want? Not necessarily, but this is what you will get for sure. That when you pray, when in everything, by prayer and supplication, you let your requests be made known to God, "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). So, the guarantee here, the promise here is that when we pray, God gives us peace. Now, this is not a piece that says, everything will turn out in your favor. Because sometimes God allows us to still go through hardships, and difficulties for our good. It's not comfortable. It's not what we want, but it is what we need and what is good for us. Nevertheless, when you are in such difficulties when you are in, under pressure, when you pray, the Bible says there will be the peace, the tranquility of God.

So, you might recall a hymn that we sing quite often, what a friend we have in Jesus. And there's this phrase that goes, "Oh what peace we often forfeit." So, the writer of the song here understands that there is a peace that comes when we pray, even when the circumstances are still difficult, there's a peace on the inside that comes through the means of prayer.

This is a picture of our building at 360 Dunearn Road. We have not been there for a long time now because for many years, we have had our worship services at different locations, since we've outgrown this little place. Of course, right now, most of us, we can't gather like we used to because of COVID. But this place is a place that brings back fond memories to me, because I remember every morning, at least every weekday morning, we will gather there for meetings and our prayers. Now Monday is a day where many of our staff would be off, that's the day they take a break, they have a rest. But that's the day I will still turn up for prayer with actually just one other person usually. And that's at that point of time, the chairman of our church committee, Dr. Muk, and I would say almost weekly, we would learn about the difficult finances, at least for a period of time, there were times that we had difficult finances, financial situations in the church. And as chairman, of course, he would have oversight of the financial matters much more than I do, I generally focus on the spiritual affairs. And so, when we get together, he would share with me he will look at the numbers. And he will look at me, and I will look at him. And we have no idea how this is going to go through or how we're going to make it. But we know that we gathered for prayer. And so, every Monday morning, we pray, we are aware of the difficulties. But you know what, every time I walk out of this place, even though I have no solutions, except that we have prayed about it, I have peace in my heart.

Now, that doesn't mean that we don't do anything else. But that does mean that we have experienced the promise of God in peace in the midst of trying times. When we do not know what else we can do, we know we can pray and God grants peace. So maybe today you're going through hardships, difficulties, and things don't turn out the way you want. But I will say please pray because that's why God gives you maybe this difficulty that you may learn to call upon him that you may establish a healthy relationship with him. And please pray, because God promises peace to you in trying times. "Oh what peace we often forfeit", just because we do not go to Him in prayer. So, the peace of God, that's what we're looking at in Philippians four.

Results

Number three, the reason why you should pray is also because of results. What I mean by that is that when you pray, things do change, not always the way we want, but in a way God wants, but things do change. You see, when I was growing up, I was discouraged from prayer, because I had believed this lie, Prayer doesn't change things. Because God is sovereign, all wise and unchanging. So when I learned about this, I was paralyzed in prayer. Now, let me say this, this statement is partially correct, and partially wrong. What is correct about this statement? The correct part of this statement is the second half that says, God is sovereign, all wise and unchanging, I absolutely believe that. And I trust you do, that the God of the Bible is absolutely sovereign, he's so much in control of everything at all times. He's the sovereign one, and he is in control, and he has every right to determine things as he would want to: sovereignty of God. Then, I also believe that God is all wise, everything God decides is the best. In other words, you do not improve upon God's ideas, or God's will, or God's plan, because

he's all wise, he knows everything there is to know. And he always chooses the best plan. And God is unchanging. If God is all wise, all powerful, all sovereign, all glorious. Why does he change? Why is there a need for God to change? The Bible tells us, God does not change because it's the perfect God. So, the second half of this statement is absolutely biblical. God is sovereign, all wise and unchanging. But the error in this statement is the first part. Prayer doesn't change things. You see, prayer doesn't change things, is a wrong statement, especially when you try to keep it on or dump it upon the character of God. All because God is sovereign, all wise and unchanging. Prayer will never change God, because he's perfect and therefore prayer will never bring about any change in anything.

Now, Therefore, when people believe this, they say prayer is only meant to show the person praying, his or her own needs. So, the basic idea here is, you don't pray to God because you think you will change Him. You pray to God, because you need to be informed of your needs. Now, I believe this for a rather long season of my life. And the net result of it is that I did not pray because I say to myself, I do not need to be informed, I already know those needs, so no need to tell myself. Now, does the Bible support this teaching? Of course not. Prayer doesn't change things is a lie. Because over and over again, the Bible says prayer does change things. For example, from the mouth of Jesus himself in the same sermon, in Matthew chapter six, and Matthew seven, he says, "Ask and it shall be given to you seek and you will find knock and it shall be open to you." This is a picture of prayer, ask and it shall be given, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you. He repeats that over and over again. And then we see in James, you do not have because you do not ask. Implication is if you ask, of course, with the right intentions, God will give. And again, we see in James five, that "The prayer of a righteous person has great power, as it is working" (James 5:16) You can look at the whole Bible, and there'll be many, many promises like this, that tells us prayer does change things. But then you say, God is perfect, all wise, sovereign, unchanging. How does prayer change God? Well, let me clarify it. Prayer doesn't change God. See, this is the paradigm. You have to grasp. Prayer changes things. That's clear biblical teaching. Matthew seven, James four and James five verses we have just read, tells us prayer changes things. But prayer doesn't change God's mind, his mind is perfect. So we can say, it is God's mind to use our prayer to change things. So rather than think that our prayer changes the mind of God, think of it this way, it has been God's Will all along to use your prayer to change things.

Let me give you a simple example. We see in First Kings chapter 18, that "the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year saying, Go show yourself to Ahab and I will send rain upon the earth." (1 Kings 18:1) Notice, God is the one who determines that rain will come. But he calls Elijah and tells him about this fact, and tells him to reveal himself to Ahab. What happens is that in verse 42, Elijah, then believing the promise of God, "bows himself down on the earth, puts his face between his knees", a posture of prayer, that we read off in James chapter five, earlier just now, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. That's referring to actually Elijah, as an example. And then we see that after a little while, "there was great rain" in verse 45. So could you see that it was the word of the Lord, that, or if I may say, the will of God, that prompted and led to the prayer of Elijah, that resulted to great results. So, prayer changes things, even though prayer doesn't change God's mind. But it is God's will, to use your prayer to bring about great change. So, prayer does work. Prayer changes things. We pray, because we believe God answers prayer. Now, he doesn't answer every time the way we want. Because sometimes we ask a miss, we ask for our selfish ambitions and lusts. We may not know what

is the best thing for us. But nevertheless, we can believe that if we pray in the center of God's will, and that's what we're going to look at in subsequent sessions, He answers prayer, not because we changed his mind, but because it delighted him to use our prayer, amazing, to bring about change.

Reward

So, why pray? We don't pray so that we impress people, but we pray because we want to have a healthy relationship with God. We pray so that there will be peace and restedness in our soul. We pray so that things change. And number four, we pray, because we believe God rewards prayer. Back to Matthew chapter six, it talks about reward. And if you do things to be seen of men, the father does not reward. But the converse is true. When you pray, ""when you go into a room, shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret". In other words, no one is going to see you. You don't want the attention of men. You're contented to pray to God alone. "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you". I believe prayer is a kind of ministry, a kind of labor. It is probably unappreciated by men, rightly so, people should not see but your father sees how you pray for His Kingdom, how you pray for others, how you pray for souls saved, how you pray for people to be helped in that weaknesses, how you pray for comfort upon your soul, you know something? That is labor, that is ministry, and God will not forget your labor of love. He will reward you some day. Why do you pray? Because you believe you're serving Him and God will not be forgetful to remember your labor.

Conclusion

So, why pray today? I hope this excites you. Oh, I want to pray because this helps me know my God and grow in my relationship, my dependence on him. I pray so that I have peace in my soul, I pray so that things will change for His glory of course. And I pray because I want to serve Him and I believe he will reward someday. I hope this has been a short, punchy but useful session for you. I look forward to seeing you after this in our Q&A session on Zoom. And I look forward to having you join us for the next three sessions that which to come. God bless. Let's close with prayer. Father, thank you again for your work. It is always so refreshing and enlightening to our soul. We pray that you will help us not just to be hearers but to be doers. Help us to be a people who exercise faith in prayer. Dear God, thank you for this time, bless your people, we ask in Jesus' name, Amen. God bless see you at our Q&A.