

Prayer (Part 3)

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[0:00] I begin again with a very important element of prayer and one that maybe is missing.

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I spell Czech, but also it tells me how to spell it right. Here I am standing before your PhD and spelling one of my... I struggle with that.

Now you can just jot that down. You'll know something about me that embarrasses me. Of course, I didn't have to tell you either, did I? So just full disclosure, openness, transparency.

That's how we ought to be with one another. Adoration. Adoration. And we could define it simply loving God and praising God for who He is and what He has done. Now that's in one concise sentence or statement.

[1:38] It is a big, big subject. And it's not my intent to deal with all the specifics. We could even call it the doctrine of adoration.

But it is this loving God. Just loving Him and praising Him. Not just for what He has done. I put that second in the list.

But first and foremost for who He is. Whether He has done anything that you have noticed lately or not.

We praise Him and worship Him because of who He is. And when we get to the things He has done, we can go back a long ways. And remember the things that He has done for us.

Starting with our creation. He created us. And He sustains us. But most importantly, we can go back to our new birth.

[2:34] To our salvation. And what God has done graciously in our behalf. And then many, many, many other things.

And really, it would be a sad thing, sad testimony, if at any given time, we could not think of something to praise Him for.

And love Him for. So, adoration is very important. The best way to enter the presence of God is through adoration. So, I normally list it first because I think it is relegated to one of the latter or more insignificant things typically.

But I list it first because it's a good place to begin in prayer. Is thanking God. Rather than just starting right out with, you know, your list of Lord help.

And give me this and give me that. That's part of our prayer life. But adoration is a good way to enter the presence of God. Psalm 34. And I didn't put the whole psalm in there.

[3:36] I guess we could look at it. But I just listed several. Verse 1. I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

We do bless Him. But now it's not in the sense that we could give Him anything. In the same sense that God blesses us. I mean, those blessings are very tangible that come from Him.

But when the Bible, when David speaks of blessing the Lord, he's talking about praising Him, worshiping Him. And I think also blessing Him through our honoring Him.

Honoring Him not only with our lips, but also with our actions and things we do. So, here's the psalmist. So, I will bless the Lord at all times.

His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Verse 3. Oh, magnify the Lord with me. This is an exhortation to others to join in.

[4:35] Let us exalt, lift up His name together. Here, you know, just the idea of magnifying the Lord. I mean, there would be a good word study there.

And I didn't take the time to go back and look at that word again. But you can imagine, you know, what the idea is here to magnify, to highlight in a big way the very nature and the wonder and the greatness and the worth of God.

And so, we're magnifying Him and exalting His name. Oh, taste. Verse 8. I love this verse. And see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him.

Verse 15. The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their cry. These are expressions of adoration. Loving God and loving Him, praising Him for who He is and for what He has done.

And, boy, I mean, the Bible, especially the book of Psalms, is just loaded with examples of this. David and the other psalmists really did exemplify for us, model for us, adoration.

[5:55] And we need to apply that to our prayer life. Number two, and everybody knows this one, thanksgiving. Thanksgiving, thanking God for what He has done.

So, you know, there's maybe a nuance of difference between praising Him for what He has done and thanking Him for what He has done. It would be a little difficult to praise Him for what He has done and that not also be thanking Him.

But there is a distinction in this particular element of prayer. That we are offering a specific word of thanks to Him.

Expressions of gratitude. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. And we know that verse, don't we? That's a very, very well-known verse in Scripture. Alright, so give thanks. That's whose will? That's the will of God. The will of God in Christ for you. By the way, when is the best time to offer your prayers at Thanksgiving? Tough times.

[7:08] Huh? All the time. Tough times. And certainly that's true. But I'm thinking of something a little bit more specific. How about when the reasons for gratitude occur?

You know, rather than waiting until the end of the day or the next morning when you have your time of prayer and say, Let's see, what has God done for me?

You know, we can utter a prayer of thanksgiving at any time. Even if it's, you know, silently in the car. Have you ever done that?

I bet you have. Thank you, Lord. You know, something He's done or something He's saved you from or something He's allowed you to see or do or experience. Answer to prayer that, you know, you've been praying for and suddenly it happens.

And, you know, sometimes we can, and not sometimes, all the time, we ought to thank Him when God hinders us from something. We don't even know what it is and for the reason.

[8:10] You know, today, at least I've been noticing for the last several weeks that I always go home down, you know, Frank Phillips and Silver Lake.

And when you get over to Adams, Silver Lake and Adams, they've done something to the stoplight there. It just takes forever to get through there. And I want to get home.

But, and I didn't today, but I have stopped to thank you, Lord, for this pause in my life, pause in my day. There may be something ahead that you want me to miss.

There may be some reason why I just need to stop and slow down. I used to pray that kind of prayer quite often when I lived in Memphis, you know, because, you know, traffic jams and such. Sometimes I don't. In case you're thinking I'm just a superhuman, spiritual person, I'd have to say more times than not, I have to regretfully admit that I am mad when I'm stopped by those traffic jams and such.

[9:17] Anyway, of course, none of you are like that. All right, number three, confession.

Confession is an element of prayer, a very important element of prayer.

And you see a short little definition that I'm sure you've heard before, but maybe, maybe you've not. Maybe you're wondering, is that what confession is?

It's agreeing with God about your sin. Now, why would we say it that way? Because of who God is. Confession is not informing God.

Is there anything He doesn't know? And I'm not just talking about something that He knows has happened. He's there. He sees it.

I'm talking about something He has known in eternity past. God's not learning things. He knows all things. He knows the end from the beginning, Scripture says.

[10:19] And so you're not going to ever inform God about something. He's not needing that, but you are agreeing with Him. And herein lies the problem in our lives in regard to sin.

That we don't always agree with God about our sin. We even debate within ourselves about sin. You know, our flesh desires to hide sin.

Maybe even justify sin. Not maybe, quite often. Justify it. Blame someone else for it. Our flesh wants to redefine it, you know.

Or at least soften the seriousness of it. It's just who we are. We can't help ourselves. But many times we suppress it, hide it.

And what we need to do is always confess it. What we need to do is say, God, You're right. I'm in agreement with you that this is sin in my life.

[11:27] And Psalm 66, 18 is... And we can quote a number of verses in the Bible, but this is a good one.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. That's a pretty serious verse of Scripture. We love those verses that convey God's promise to hear our prayers.

But what about those promises in the Bible that He will not hear? And they are there. And this is a prime example. He said if...

Or the Bible says, the psalmist said, If I regard... God's saying to us, If you regard iniquity in my heart, I will not hear you. So it's pretty important that in our prayer life, that we confess our sins. We agree with God about our sins. By the way, the word regard, we could substitute any number of words in there. Not any number, but some other words that maybe would help define it.

[12:35] We could put in there, and you ought to jot this down, validate iniquity. Make it valid. You know, it's valid. Or excuse iniquity in my heart.

Or cherish iniquity in my heart. Good grief. Oh, that's a... Okay. I thought it was a mad motorist out there honking his horn.

Okay, you need to pray. Okay, and I don't know if I... Did I put in your notes some steps to take in confession? Did I put that down there?

Okay. And this is just, you know, kind of common sense. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal hidden, forgotten sin. Have you ever done that in prayer? You know, we have that kind of sin in our life that's hidden.

A lot of times we have hidden it. And we've let time pass. We have allowed space to come between the infraction of God's law, the sin, and our confession of it.

[13:46] And then we just kind of lose sight of it. So we need to ask God. Reveal hidden sin. Reveal forgotten sin.

That's not coming to the Lord in prayer and saying, And if I've sinned, forgive me. You know. And I can hear God say, If you've sinned. I'm not talking about that.

I'm talking about God, asking God to reveal specifically sin that you have forgotten about. You've tucked it away. You've kind of blocked it out of your mind.

Maybe you've even justified it. Or it could even be a sin that you've not called sin. And you're asking God, Reveal sin that I have called right, but you call wrong.

And ask God to do that. Now be ready to get an answer about that. And I guess the tendency for most of us would be to kind of avoid any kind of questions like that because we don't want to deal with that kind of thing.

[14:57] But hidden sin is a serious, serious thing in the life of the believer. Hidden to ourselves and hidden to others.

Not that we need to go around confessing all of our hidden sins to one another. I think our confessions to one another ought to match the scope of the infraction.

If we have sinned against an individual, then we need to go to that one and confess the sin and ask for forgiveness. If we've sinned against a group, then it needs to extend to the group.

But if it's hidden sin, private sin, then you confess it to the Lord. But sometimes we need God to, you know, like Adrian Rogers used to say, turn on the searchlight in our soul, in our hearts, and illuminate every nook and cranny in there so that we can deal with those things in a scriptural way. So, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal hidden, forgotten sin. Confess sins individually. Not just, forgive me for my sins. Amen.

[16:06] But confessing them specifically, individually, and asking for cleansing. Because sin always defiles us.

We get dirty hands, and dirty feet, and dirty eyes, and minds, and tongues. You know, it defiles, it gets us dirty, and we need to ask God for cleansing.

And make restitution where called for. That's an important part of it. And it's something we would rather not do, especially if the sin involves another person.

And we have sinned, and we need to make that right. Maybe we have said something, you know, coarse, or something, you know, whatever, that was damaging to their character. We need to make restitution. And then thank God for His gracious forgiveness in Christ. Now, don't let time pass between the sin and the confession.

[17:11] I guess I've heard this a hundred times. It used to be popular among preachers. They'd say, keep short accounts with God. And maybe almost a cliché, but it's true.

Keep short accounts. I had a couple of quotes here from Adrian Rogers. Did I put those in there? Yeah. All right, good. I like these. God deals with the devil's crowd on credit, but with Christians on a cash basis.

Pretty good. But this one's my favorite. There are a lot of folks who think they can sow their wild oats six days a week and then pray for crop failure on Sunday. That's really a good one.

Just for your enjoyment. Number four, intercession. intercession. Very important element of prayer. Intercession.

Praying for other people. Saved and lost. intercession. Number five, petition.

[18:17] Petition. And this one is, we're good at this one. This one, we don't have a problem doing this.

Now, we could be better at it, I'm sure, but petition is, of course, asking God for personal needs.

Philippians 4, 6. I don't think I've provided that in there, but let me jot it down.

Let your requests be made known to God. Now, we've already used that verse, quoted that verse, in connection with a number of other aspects of prayer. But it certainly fits here.

Let your requests be made known to God. Those are petitions. We're lifting up specific things that we need. And does God answer all of those petitions?

Yeah. I thought I'd catch you, but you're too astute. Yeah, he always answers. Sometimes it's no. But, wait.

[19:20] Sometimes it's wait. And sometimes it's yes. Often it's yes. But our, you know, we're lifting up requests that are not selfish, in the sense that we're just feeding, want to feed our own flesh.

You can be sure God's not going to answer those. Unless he wants us to answer those, so we'll learn a lesson. Because sometimes we ask for things that are not good for us. And we don't even see it, don't even know it.

And, in fact, I had a book a number of years ago that was given to me. And I don't know if I still have it in my library. It's a short, small, little, little booklet almost. It says, be careful what you pray.

Because all things are possible through prayer. Now, you know, kind of the application of Scripture aside, I get, you get the point that sometimes God gives you things you ask for.

And then you find out that wasn't. And you learn, you learn something from that. God's very wise. All right.

[20:24] Obstacles to answered prayer. The first one is pride. At least the first one that I've listed.

I don't know that I've put any kind of order of importance here, a priority, but pride is a big, big, big obstacle of prayer. In fact, pride is the root of all of our problems and sin.

I mean, you trace every sin, and it ends up with pride. It's birthed by it. And Proverbs 29, 23, a man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.

Pride always damages us. Now, I'm not, I'm not talking about allowable pride, good pride. You know, we're proud in the Lord for things that he's done.

We can be proud of our children. I'm not, the Bible is not prohibiting that. We can be proud of them. We're talking about pride that exalts self and feeds the flesh.

[21:33] And pride is thinking that you're better than God knows you are. And probably a lot of other people know too. And then a number that we could, sub points there, pride blinds us.

It blinds us. Revelation 3, 27. This is a part of the letter to the Laodicean church. Because you say, I'm rich, I have become, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.

That's a very proud outlook. On life. And many people are there. I'm rich. Got everything I need. Don't need anything.

And you do not even know that you're wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Pride is, it blinds us from our true need. Our spiritual need.

Before God. Pride. Blinds us from acknowledging our sin and so forth. Pride. It keeps us from God. It's a separator.

[22:42] It's a barrier between us and God in our fellowship. James 4, 6. But He gives more grace. Therefore, He says, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

He resists. Now think about how visual that is. And, you know, you could use a number of metaphors. I have in the past used a metaphor of a football player, the running back with the football, and he puts his arm out to push away.

His stiff arm, his potential tackler. You know, that's God pushing. We're coming to Him. We want to come to Him, but our pride causes Him to push us away from Him.

Now, He doesn't hate us. It's in the context of the believer. It's not that God is pushing us out of His family, but in relation to our communion with Him, our fellowship with Him, so that we can commune with Him and lift up our prayers to Him, God is pushing us away.

It's humility that causes God to respond with grace, to give grace. So, pride blinds us.

[24:01] It keeps us away from God. It keeps us from God. Pride is a sin. Well, that ought to go without saying. Well, it ought to say it, but we already know this, don't we?

Pride is a sin to be repented of. Proverbs 21.4, a haughty look, or haughty eyes, prideful eyes, these are kind of parallel thoughts.

Proud heart. And this is kind of a confusing part of the verse, at least in the New... Well, really about any translation, it's kind of difficult. In the New King James, and the plowing of the wicked are sin. Anybody want to explain that? The plowing of the wicked. I heard Avery and Roger, I was just on my mind, I heard him explain it this way, I don't think he was necessarily right, but he applied it to the prideful life of a person that separates them so from God that even the good things they do in life are a sin to God.

Like a farmer plowing his field. Anything sinful about that, but even his work is an affront to God because he has allowed pride to come between them.

[25:27] Well, that may... I don't know if that's necessarily the right application. Actually, the word is lamp. I don't know. Does the ESV have a lamp in there? I don't know. The NASB may have that too.

I don't recall. The lamp of the wicked. And it really is a kind of parenthetical kind of statement. And it really, I think, applies to the person who has a haughty eyes and proud heart, walks pridefully, and his pride is the lamp for his path so that he is so deceived that even in his walk of life, even those things that...

the other things that he does that are sinful, he doesn't see them as sin because they have become the lamp for his path. And he has a tendency, or she, to justify everything else he does, or she does, because they see everything from a vantage point of pridefulness and haughtiness so that it almost becomes the lamp by which they justify everything else in their life.

It's kind of an interesting verse of Scripture, and I wish we had time to talk about that more. Pride destroys.

Pride destroys. Proverbs 16, 18. Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Pride always is destructive in our lives.

[27:06] And it leads, by the way, to a multitude of other sins. Again, you don't have to really analyze it very closely to find out some sin activity is rooted in pride and self-centeredness.

Almost always. And it's, of course, a sin that God hates. Number two, disobedience. It's obviously an obstacle to answered prayer.

Disobedience. John 14, 15. If you love me, keep my commandments. Ephesians 5, 5. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, or covetous man who is an idolater has any inheritance to the kingdom of Christ.

Let no one deceive you by empty words. For because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Now, if this applies to the unbeliever, then what changes, what makes us think that that would change for the believer before God?

Not that, you know, he's going to destroy us, like he will one day all unbelievers. But there is a destruction of our fellowship and prayer is such a vital part.

[28:26] You can't hardly separate fellowship and prayer. Open communication with God. When you're in fellowship with someone, in communion with them, then you have a free line of communication, open communication.

But when there is disobedience, then that line of communication is cut off. In fact, you don't even want to see the person. If you have disobeyed, you know, or sinned against a good friend, you

know, you almost want to avoid them.

There's no line, no openness, no communion. And this is what disobedience does to our prayer. Here's an excellent definition of disobedience. Did I give this to you? I can't remember what I put in your notes.

It looks like I gave you about everything, which is good. Have you heard of this definition before?

Oh, do you have fill in the blank on those?

No. Obedience is. Yeah, obedience is. Oh, that's all you have? Yeah. Oh, you've got it on. All right.

Okay. Let me just read through it.

[29:40] Obedience is, number one, doing. We can stop right there. Is there obedience without doing?

It's action. It's an activity. It's not just thinking about doing what you've been told. It's not just saying, well, you know, I need to do that.

And, you know, it's right that I do that. And I'm going to do it one of these days. I might get around to it. But it's just empty, hollow if obedience doesn't result in activity.

So it's doing. And doing what? Exactly. Not part of the way. Not some of it. Not doing it, you know, in your own kind of way.

It's doing exactly what I'm told to do. And when. When I am told to do it. This is an excellent definition of obedience.

[30:44] We've taught this to our kids. They forgot it from time to time over the years and still do. But, you know, it's not just doing what you're told to do.

It's doing exactly what you're told to do. And it's not just doing exactly what you're told when you want to. It's when you're told to do it. Boy, that's a key part of it, isn't it?

And with the right heart attitude. And that's a key part, too. Not with teeth clenched and gritting and, oh, right, I'll do it. With the right heart attitude.

You know, that definition for obedience certainly can apply. In every context. But it absolutely does apply. In the context of our fellowship with God.

And disobedience short circuits our prayer life. And I think I mentioned this maybe last time, time before. You know, if you've disobeyed God and you haven't made that right.

[31:53] Then when you come to Him in prayer, that's the first thing He's going to bring up. First thing. Kind of closes that door, doesn't it? Yeah. And then you say, oh. You know, and then I have all these things I want to ask God for.

And I can't get past this. Because, you know, a lot of people, to a lot of people, preaching and teaching strict obedience to God's Word is, in their minds, many people's minds, especially in our culture, a form of slavish legalism.

Have you noticed this in our, kind of the trends of our culture? That for Christians, Christian parents, and all the way up to pastors, teachers, you know, to always be proclaiming, obey God's Word.

That somehow strict obedience is legalism. Is it? Well, absolutely not. The truth is that God's laws have been given to free us, not to enslave us.

And with that, we could say to protect us and to bless us and all that. Certainly not to enslave us. I've used this illustration before. I think I have here.

[33:15] I can't do it in here because I don't have a piano. But remember, I've used this illustration. If we had a piano here, I guarantee you, if I went over to the piano and sat there and started to play something, you would find out real quick, I don't know, a thing about piano.

You know, Jonathan does. And there are others in here who do, I'm sure. And, you know, Jonathan could go sit at that piano and just play. Now, what's the difference between Jonathan and me?

Now, there are a number of differences. But in regard to playing the piano, the difference is that I have not submitted myself to the laws of piano play. Jonathan has.

Now, there are levels to that as well, you know, practice and so forth. There's knowledge involved, too. But you can't just go over there and play the piano any way you want to.

You must submit yourself to the laws. And then when you do, and then with a lot of practice, then you can make beautiful music. And it's a real blessing.

[34:20] And there's freedom. When it comes to the piano, just because I, you know, I'm not going to submit to the laws of piano playing because that's legalistic.

I want to be free. I'm the one who's not free. I'm enslaved. But Jonathan is free. He's not enslaved. In fact, he's the most free person I've ever, ever known when it comes to piano playing.

Anyway, so, and repeatedly, the Bible promises blessings to those who obey his word. Now, I may not have put this in your notes. I don't know. Did I? Deuteronomy 11, 26, 27.

Okay. Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse. All right. Which one are you going to pick? Well, the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I command you today.

The blessing comes through what? Obedience. Obedience to God's commands. Curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, but turn aside from the way which I've commanded you today.

[35:24] Now, of course, he's speaking to a specific audience here, but through the inspiration of Scripture and the Holy Spirit, this applies to our lives.

And so, he's set before us. Which one do you want? Do you want the blessing or the cursing? Well, you want the blessing. What brings the blessing? Obedience to the word. Number three, you might have to quit.

I'm not going to get through all. I think there are ten of these. Let me give you one more. Failure to abide or remain in Christ. Depends on your translation.

To abide. Remain probably is more descriptive. And you know, here, John 15, 7, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you.

Now, you know, be careful about too broadly defining or, you know, defining this too broadly.

[36:37] Let's not split the infinitive there. Because it's not that just, you know, everything you ask, God's going to answer. The key is abiding in him.

That's the key. And so, you will ask for the right things if you're abiding in him, remaining in him.

Like the, and this is the metaphor that he used, like the branch to the vine. So that all of the sustenance from the vine comes to the branch.

We are close to him and attached to him and committed to him. And we are in fellowship, communing with him. And it guides our prayers. Now, when we're separated from the vine, using that metaphor, then we're hindered.

There's not life. His life flowing in us like it should in that practical sense. So we need to abide.

When we fail to do that, then our prayers are hindered.