

Prayer (Part 2)

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[0:00] I believe that when we finished last time, I was ready to start with prayer as my response to the invitation of God.

! I'm not sure what page that would be, but it's right after that beautiful artwork. Page right after that, I think, somewhere in there.

So prayer, then, first thing we said with prayer is my response to the character of God. And now, second, prayer is my response to the invitation of God.

And that invitation is multifaceted. He's inviting us on several different points. The first one is prayer. Number one, prayer is the invitation of God to fellowship. Fellowship. Fellowship. I don't know if, and really we ought to think of prayer in this regard, but I know that we think of it as often as we should, that prayer, our prayer time, really is fellowship, fellowshiping with God.

[1:24] That's why I think we often refer to the, quote, quiet time as a time of communion, that we're communing with God. And I think that's a good way to put it.

Our prayer life is generally, or at least at specific times in the day, is combined with Bible study and devotional time.

And so really, there is a communion going on there. And so, we ought to think of prayer in this way, that prayer is an invitation. It's an invitation of God, that we would come to Him in prayer.

It's an invitation, not just to, you know, list the things we need and want, but to come to Him for fellowship. Thank you. And I, there are a number of verses that we could certainly look at that would support this truth.

Psalms 27, verses 4 and then 8 is what I've provided for you there. Let me read through it. One thing I have desired of the Lord. So, you can just kind of hear the heartbeat of the psalmist here.

[2:34] One thing I have desired of the Lord. That will I seek. And what is that one thing? That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. Now, when he says that, of course, this maybe reminds us of Psalm 23, because the same concept is there.

In fact, it's stated more in terms of a promise there. You know, what is this idea of dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of my life?

We're not talking necessarily just strictly about heaven, are we? No, because he's talking about life. It's a reference to the here and now. It is, I think, an invitation or a desire for a very personal, very deep fellowship, communion with God.

I would dwell with Him. No matter where I am, I am dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. To behold the beauty of the Lord. To inquire in His temple.

And then verse 8 says, When you said, Seek my face, my heart said to you, Your face, Lord, I will seek. You remember sometime back, several months ago, we kind of walked through a series on seeking God.

[4:00] Seeking and finding God so that we know Him more and love Him more. And one of the principles that we considered was this idea of seeking His face rather than His hands.

Just His hands. We tend to seek His hands and not His face. But to seek His face is something different, isn't it? When you seek a person's face, you're seeking that person for who that person is. And when you seek a person's face, you are wanting to enjoy their company. And not just seeking them for what they can do for you. And so the whole idea behind this is fellowship.

It's intimacy. It is love. And it is an invitation. Because He said, when you said, speaking of God, when you, God, said, Seek my face.

That's an invitation. Seek my face. Don't just seek my hands, but seek my face. And then, of course, the psalmist said, My heart said to you, your face, Lord, I will seek.

[5:11] All right, so the idea is clearly one of communion, one of fellowship. And what I'm suggesting to you is that we ought to think of our prayer life in this sense.

That it's actually God desiring, not just inviting, but even deeper than that, desiring that we would come to have fellowship with Him.

Think about that the next time you pray. In whatever context. Whether it is your quiet time, your time of devotional, or just praying before a meal.

Or at other times, when you're just compelled to pray, or led to prayer, or maybe you're praying in a group, or whatever the context.

Think of it as you're actually coming into the very presence of God. You're spending time with Him. And He wants you to have that fellowship with Him.

[6:10] Number two, prayer is the invitation of God to rest in Him. To rest in Him. 1 Peter 5, verses 6 and 7.

Therefore, humble yourselves. I hope that doesn't fall in on us here. I mean, this building is paid for now. We don't... All right. Therefore, humble yourselves.

And under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him. Now, that's the most familiar part of the verse, isn't it? Casting all your care upon Him for what?

He cares for you. He cares. Casting all your care. How many of you cares? All of them. I mean, this is not complicated, is it? And do we do that all the time?

And we may eventually, but we kind of want to hold on to them and carry them ourselves for a time until we're just totally worn out. And then maybe we turn them over to Him.

[7:11] Or maybe we tend not to ever turn some of the more difficult things. We just kind of carry them. But God wants us to rest.

Wants us to rest by turning all of our cares over to Him. Now, does that mean that then we don't have to do anything? You know, we just, you know, we, well, I'll just turn this over to you, God.

And, you know, just let go and let God. And I'll just sit back. And, you know, no, He still wants us to be involved. There are things He wants us to do.

I mean, if one of the cares of your life requires that you do something, then you need to do it. You need to do it. Now, you are trusting in Him.

And you are turning that care over to Him. Or the care and the anxiety and the concern that you have over that particular issue. But you still are obedient.

[8:15] Still following the instructions of His Word. You're still doing the things you know you are to do, even if they're difficult. But you're not carrying the burden for them.

You've cast that care upon Him. And He cares for you. Alright, so prayer is an invitation of God to rest in Him. Prayer is the invitation of God to find strength.

And that's what we need, isn't it? Because we don't have any. We really don't have any. I'm not talking about our own strength.

We have plenty of that. In fact, that's part of our problem. I'll make a comment about that here in just a minute. But let me read Isaiah 40, verses 29 and 31.

He gives power to the weak. And that's who we are. We're weak. And to those who have no might, He increases strength.

[9:16] And that's who we are. We have no might. He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary. And the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. And we're familiar with that verse of Scripture. Now, here's our problem, I would suggest to you.

And I don't know if you've ever thought of it in these terms. Here's our problem. We're too strong. We're too strong. And I would even broaden that to take in the biggest problem for our country. is that we're too strong. We're too self-sufficient. We don't need God. I'm not just talking about lost people. I mean, I'm talking about to God's people.

To His church. The reason we struggle, the reason why we don't see the blessing of God, is because we're too strong.

[10:21] We have never come to the place where, we tend not to come to the place where we admit that we have no strength whatsoever. We're kind of caught up in a mentality, and maybe it's

just being an American.

And this is kind of the downside of our Americanism, is that we think we've got to get in there, we do it ourselves, and be strong, pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and that kind of thing.

Now, there's a place for that. I'm not totally negating the fact that we don't need to be wimps all the time. You say, well, I just can't do it.

But we don't call upon it. See, we don't pray and turn things over to God and trust Him with things because we're too strong. We think we can do it.

And if it's a financial problem, instead of trusting the Lord with it, we just go down to the bank, borrow the money, or file bankruptcy. You know, we have so many ways out of trusting God with things.

[11:29] We have mechanisms in place in our society, and more of them being piled on every day, where we don't have to trust God, we can just trust our government. We don't have to trust God, we trust a friend.

A friend. Or we trust ourselves to just get ourselves out of this problem, whatever it is. But we need to trust God. See, we're too strong.

So, here's God's invitation to us, and this is a part of what prayer is. It's responding to this invitation of God to find the strength we need from Him.

If you're a Sunday school teacher, you trust Him to give you the strength to teach that class. If you serve in some other capacity in the church, you don't have it in you to serve the Lord in a way that would honor Him.

It's only through His strength, operating through your life as a dynamic of Christian living, that will please God. And so we trust Him for His strength.

[12:30] So this is what we do in prayer. We're not just, again, just listing the things we need, you know, or listing our failures. We're actually also coming to the Lord and saying, God, give me strength, the strength that I need to be the father, the husband I need to be, the mother, the wife I need to be, the parent I need to be.

That's the invitation of God, to find strength for all those things in life. Number four, prayer is the invitation of God to bear one another's burdens, to be an intercessor is what we're talking about here.

Ephesians 6, 18-20, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication, that's petition, and then what?

For all the saints. And I see this litany of, you know, features of prayer is all directed toward our responsibility to pray for one another.

Now, we pray for ourselves, but the idea here is to pray for all the saints. Who are the saints? That's St. Francis of Assisi and a saint. Who are the saints?

[13:52] That's us. You could jot next to that verse the set-apart ones. We're in Christ. We are saints, sanctified.

And we're the saints, so what are we to do? We're to pray for one another. How important is that? And we do a little of that on Wednesday night. You know, we list a few things and talk about a few things and they're all important.

But, it's not just Wednesday night. In our prayer lives, our own personal prayer life, we need to pray for one another. And you can't pray, possibly, for every member of the church every time you go to the Lord in prayer, but you can have a method or you can be sensitive to God's prompting, the prompting of your heart and mind for a certain one in the church that needs prayers.

And maybe, you know, the more we develop that kind of sense, develop that kind of discipline, the more I think God will speak to us in our prayer time. I think you've discovered that, haven't you?

The more you begin to move your thinking away from self and to others within the body of Christ, the more God will prompt you to pray. You may not even know why you're praying for them.

[15:12] They just have come to your mind. You know, that person has come to your mind and you pray for them. But we have plenty of others in our church that we do know something about that we ought to pray for.

So, pray for all the saints. And I like the rest of the verse because, well, this may sound selfish, but Paul says, and for me. I need you to pray for me.

Now, I didn't write the verse, but Paul is praying from the standpoint of a missionary, a preacher, a pastor in a sense. And he says, pray for all the saints and pray for me.

You know, I'm one of them, but pray for me specifically. And then he gives some specifics about that. That utterance may be given to me. That I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.

For which I am an ambassador in chains. That in it, I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. I can think of, you know, there are a lot of things I hope you would pray for me about.

[16:14] You know, I'm not just a preacher. I'm also a pastor and also a husband and a parent. You know, there are a lot of things that I would love for you to pray for me about. But my main task is the proclamation of the word of God to make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador.

Now, I'm not in chains, not in the same way that Paul was in chains when he wrote this. But he was a slave to the gospel and so am I. And so, pray that utterance would be given to me, that I would open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel and not hold anything back, not whitewash anything, not skip things because maybe it's not politically correct or maybe it might offend, but to preach the word of God with all boldness.

So, pray for me about that. Let's pray for one another. Alright, so prayer then is the invitation of God to bear one another's burdens. Alright, the next thing is some prayer tips.

Kind of an interesting way of putting it. I first had the word secrets on there, but secrets didn't sound. These are tips. Alright, tips on prayer.

First one is this. Let your gaze, now follow this very closely, let your gaze be on God and your glance be on your requests.

[17:45] Now, this is an original with me. I don't remember where I got it, actually. but I read this and in fact, I think, well, anyway, it doesn't matter.

Now, I think I remember but you wouldn't know it. It's a friend of mine. But anyway, think about this concept. Let your gaze, of course, gaze me. That's the thing you really focus on.

Let that be on God and your glance be on your request. It's kind of like driving down the highway, you know, and you're, you know, maybe in driver's education you were taught and maybe if you didn't have driver's education your mom or dad or somebody taught you, you know, to never focus on any one thing all the time.

You just glance at a lot of things. But if there's anything your gaze is on, it's what's up ahead of you. It's on the road but you glance at a number of other things, don't you?

That's kind of the idea. Our gaze is to be on God. The glance is to be on our requests, our needs, our problems, our burdens, you know, the difficulties of life. Just those are our glance.

[18:56] And Peter's a good example. Matthew 14, 28. And you know this story very well. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.

Remember this, they're out in the boat, they've been in a storm and Jesus was up in the mountain praying and he looked and he saw them toiling, you know, fretting about the storm and he goes out to them walking on the water.

It was a tremendous miracle. And then Peter, being the bold one that he was, said, you know, call me out. Let me come out and walk you on the water.

And so he said, come. Interesting. And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. So here's Peter walking on the water. Here's a tremendous lesson here, by the way, that the very thing that just moments before was threatening to be over their heads was already under Jesus' feet.

I think about that concept. But here's Peter walking on the water. But things didn't go well. When he saw, that's key word, he saw, what did he see?

[20:07] That the wind was boisterous. Now, you don't see wind. You see the effects of wind. So what's he looking at? He's looking at the sea and the churning water and the white capping of the waves and so forth.

Now, Jesus is walking all along of that. He has dominion over that and authority over that and power over all of that. And Peter, for a while, is because his gaze is where?

It's on Christ. But then he got to noticing some other things and so his gaze, you know, you put it in a lot of different ways. You've heard preachers, I'm sure, say that he took his eyes off of Jesus and that's the idea here.

And it's a good example for us as we walk through life that we keep our gaze on Christ and let our glance, it's not that we just turn a blind eye to all the other things.

You know, that somehow, you know, this idea that, you know, if we look at it it doesn't exist. You know, you can't just ignore things. Those are just your glance.

[21:13] You're aware of those things and your gaze is on Christ. And so, here's a prayer tip. If your gaze is always on him, the things that you glance at, the things that come into your life, some of them may threaten you, they burden you, whatever they may be, you bring them to the Lord in prayer.

So, that's a good tip. You know, that old hymn, Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. And that's a biblical concept. Alright? So, let your gaze be on God and your glance be on your requests. number two, let prayer be your first choice and not your last.

I mean, this isn't complicated, really, is it? I mean, as soon as we hear that and write that down, we say, well, I know that. But, we're such failures.

I say, we, you say, you've got a frog in your pocket, Pastor. I fail at this. You know, there's some things that we're very quick to bring to the Lord in prayer and then there are other things we just fret, worry about and try every other way to solve before we come to the Lord in prayer.

[22:40] King Asa, I gave you an example here in 2 Chronicles 16. Asa, by the way, was the great, great grandson son of King David. And, in this passage, it's interesting, in the 39th year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet and his malady was severe.

Now, we don't know what it was, you know, but it was severe and yet, in his disease, he did not seek the Lord. That's an epitaph upon his life.

Did not seek the Lord, but the physicians. Physicians, excuse me. So, Asa rested with his fathers, he died in the 41st year of his reign. So, he was burdened with this thing and sought the physicians for some kind of cure, but never did take it to the Lord and he died because of it.

It's what we're to understand from the passage. Now, this is not, obviously, an argument for not having doctors. We don't need doctors, we just need to pray to the Lord and trust Him.

That's not it at all. The key here is that he did not seek the Lord. He should have sought the Lord for this thing first. Now, maybe he still would have needed to go to a physician.

[23:57] We need to pray, of course, about our physical ailments, physical problems, some of them sometimes very severe, maybe even terminal, if not for ourselves, for our family members and others.

You know, we need to pray, seek the Lord first, but we also will seek the physicians. Remember how Paul instructed the church at Philippi, Philippians 4, 6-7, he said, be anxious for nothing. Don't be anxious about anything. But in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

be anxious for nothing. The implication being that, you know, our anxiety over whatever the issue is, is usually because we've not trusted the Lord.

We've not gone to Him first. You know, the anxiety came first. You know, we're worrying about it, fretting about it, and all distressed about it. And we're, but we need to take it to Him.

[25:09] He says, in everything by prayer and supplication and so forth, make your requests known to God. Number three, pray more from conviction rather than crisis.

Pray more from conviction rather than crisis. This is a pretty key tip, I think, in prayer or encouragement in prayer.

The implication of Philippians 4, 6, be anxious for nothing. But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Be anxious for nothing. Now, clearly, I mean, just straightforward reading of that passage and that particular phrase, clearly God does not want us to be filled with anxiety when the crises come.

That's clear from the text. He doesn't want us to be worried, overly anxious, you know, even to the point of being defeated when a crisis comes.

[26:15] Clearly, that's what he's saying there, but we can infer something else from this command. And it is a command, by the way. And this is what we ought to infer from this.

If we will pray more out of conviction, then we will often avoid many, not all, but many of the causes of crises in our lives.

That is, pray on the front end rather than after the crisis has come. I think if we would pray out of conviction, we would avoid some of the struggles we have in life.

And therefore, avoid even the potential for anxiety. I think that's implied also in the text. For example, pray for your children and your grandchildren, maybe great grandchildren, before they face some of the temptations they're going to face in life.

Because you know they're going to face them. Pray for them before. Pray for them before some of the natural struggles of life come and problems come.

[27 : 23] Pray for them before. And they're not going to avoid all of it because many of those things are designed by God to temper us, to test us, to grow us, mature us. But some of the things that we face we could have avoided if we had been diligent in prayer before.

And so we pray for our children in regard to these things. I'll give you another example. Pray for personal purity in your life before the temptations come. So that you're praying that God would fortify your heart and your mind temptation against some of the temptations toward impurity. You pray before the temptations ever come and maybe you'll avoid even some of those temptations. Pray for your marriage. Pray for your marriage.

Pray for all types of personal relationships while everything is going well. We tend to operate according to crisis management when it comes to prayer.

When it comes to most things in your life. It's not until the crisis has come that we suddenly feel the burden to do something about it or to pray about it.

[28 : 43] And we certainly do need to pray then as well, of course. But if we pray more out of conviction rather than crisis, then many of the struggles that we have we will not have.

Not all, but many of them. And again, the point is pray before the fact, not after. And avoid some of the anxieties of life. Number four, let your prayers be filled with thanksgiving.

Your prayers be filled with thanksgiving. Again, Philippians 4.6, and I keep going back to this particular one because it's kind of one of those all-encompassing passages in the Bible.

But Philippians 4.6 says we're to pray with thanksgiving. It says with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And so all of our prayer, our prayers, all the various elements of prayer are mixed with thanksgiving.

Mixed with it. And then there, and also there ought to be a time where it's just specifically focused on lifting up our gratitude, our thanksgivings to God.

[29 : 57] Number five, pray retail, not wholesale. Pray retail, not wholesale. What in the world does that mean?

Well, pray specific details in prayer, full details, and do not use generalities. The reason why we, well, there are a couple reasons really why we pray such general prayers quite often because we don't take enough time to pray.

You know, when you have just left yourself just a short amount of time, then, you know, you've got to pray more in generalities. You know, bless so-and-so, help me today, you know, just very general things.

And, again, Philippians 4, 6 instructs us, in everything, literally every single thing, let your request, what?

Be made known to God. Now, that implies, well, really, it's even very explicit when you consider the language here, explicit that we give details.

[31 : 14] we speak very detailed with God. You know, how can we make anything known without full details? I mean, we, we, we, we, you know, make requests of God in such general terms.

If, if we were to make those same requests of a friend, they wouldn't know what we wanted. They'd say, well, but God knows all things. So, so I'm just trusting in his, you know, his omniscience.

He knows what I'm thinking. He knows what I need. And that'll work to a point. I mean, because sometimes we don't know how to be specific. We may not even know what it is we're asking for.

And there are times when we pray that way. We just say, God, I don't know what the answer is. I just pray that you would provide and move in the best possible way.

but that's only, you know, maybe a small percentage of our petitions that we would lift up to God. There are many things that we ought to pray about that we know details about, and we need to be very detailed about them.

[32 : 23] In fact, you ought to jot this down. Most of our prayers are so general. I don't have this in your notes, do I? All right, just jot this down. Most of our prayers are so general that if God were to answer them, we wouldn't even know it.

You know, we might, on Sunday morning, you might get up early, have your prayer time before we meet for church, and you ask God to bless our worship services.

And what would that look like? And so after the service is over, can you thank the Lord for blessing our service? Well, you could in a general way, about as general as your request was.

But we need to be specific in our prayers. So pray retail, not wholesale. Number six, and I'll end with this one, pray, of course this is, everybody knows this, pray in the spirit and not in the flesh. Philippians 3.3, we are the circumcision who worship God in spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, have no confidence in the flesh.

[33:46] Now, this is a very difficult, possibly a difficult concept to just really nail down in our minds. What does it mean? What's the difference between praying in the spirit and praying in the flesh?

Well, it means a number of things that we could spend a lot of time talking about. I mean, just the very subject of living according to the spirit, and that's the same idea, but this applied to a specific discipline of our spiritual lives.

What does it mean to do everything according to the spirit, to worship according to the spirit, serve in the spirit and not in the flesh? Well, it very basically means that you need to be right with God. You need to be right with Him. Are you right with Him? I mean, everything alright with you, between you and God? You say, well, as far as I know, I think everything's okay.

Is there any sin unconfessed? Any point of rebellion that you've just not dealt with? I mean, anything that's going on in your life right now that would damage or put a wedge between you and God and your fellowship with Him, your communion with Him?

[35:05] If so, then there's no possible way for you to pray in the spirit. You can pray, but it's in the flesh. And I bet you've experienced this, if you're a believer, I know you have, and I'm assuming we're all believers here, that you've not dealt with something in your life, you've disobeyed Him, or you've not done what He's commanded you to do, and you've not dealt with that, and then you get on your knees for your time of prayer, and what's the first thing God says to you?

He points you to that thing, whatever that thing is. Now, you need to deal with it right then, because if you don't, and you just go on with your prayer, it's all in the flesh, and then the next time, it'll be much easier for you to just pray in the flesh.

But, usually, the next time, too, you know, you say, God, you know, and you'll pray for something, God said, yeah, I know about that, but what about this? And you're convicted, and you need to deal with that.

And then the next time, and the next time, and pretty soon, you're just really just operating according to the flesh. Now, that not only affects your prayer life, it affects every other area of your life as a believer, until you get that account taken care of with God.

I'm not talking about, you know, there's no implication here about your salvation. The implication or the problem here, is fellowship, communion with God, open communication with Him in prayer, that is always short-circuited by unconfessed, unrepentant of sin.

[36:56] So, in the most basic sense, there's no problem, this whole idea of praying in the Spirit and not in the flesh, first, the issue is sin, and next to that, which is closely akin to sin, is obedience.

obedience. And, you're obeying Him in His Word, and you already have a close fellowship and communion with Him, so that when you come to prayer, because you have, like the verse, delighted yourself in the Lord, you delight in Him, and in a sense, your whole life is worshiping Him and honoring Him, then He gives you the desires of your heart.

the connection between those two things, your fellowship with Him, communion with Him, and being right with Him, is so closely connected, there's no way to separate that from prayer, vital prayer.

So, pray in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Alright, next time we'll talk about some elements of prayer, and these are very basic, and then we'll talk about some hindrances or some obstacles to prayer, and there are a number of those, and we'll get into that next time.

Thank you.