

From Our Lips to God's Ears: The Principles of Prayer

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Date: 04 February 2024

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, February 4th, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon, last time I checked, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.

So we're continuing in our sermon series from our lips to God's ears, living a life of prayer. Over the coming weeks, we're going to continue to explore many different aspects of prayer and be reminded why it's so critical that we seek to be people of prayer.

And in our sermon last week, we considered the privilege of prayer. We recognized that prayer is not a privilege that is truly available to everyone, and we understood why that is.

Not in the ways, at least, in which some people may perceive that it is available to them. And maybe, as we talked about, that was a surprise to some of us. We also recognize that prayer is a rich privilege that is available to anyone who's become a child of God by placing their faith in Jesus Christ and obeying God's word.

And prayer is also a privilege that's available to sinners who are truly, genuinely seeking after truth and righteousness. Those people will be heard as God's will, as God will provide them the opportunity to hear and obey the truth of the gospel.

[1 : 23] God will make a way for that to happen. And so we're continuing this morning in our series as we explore the reality of the full benefit of prayer that comes only as we observe the principles of prayer.

And we're going to explore those this morning. So what is a principle in charge of a school, perhaps? That's one definition.

But a principle, it feels like a word that begs to have a clear definition, particularly for this context. So you can see it on the screen. One of the ways the Oxford Dictionary defines the word principle is as a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

Too early for that kind of definition, maybe. So when it comes to prayer, we're going to specifically be looking at the principles, the fundamental truths or propositions about prayer that were outlined for us by Jesus and his disciples.

And we're also going to consider some principles that actually determine the final outcomes of our prayers. So let's get right into this.

[2 : 43] What are the principles of prayer that should shape the way in which we pray? Well, the first principle of prayer is that we must pray in faith.

So you're sitting there hearing that and you're thinking, well, duh. So by its very nature, prayer requires faith. Matthew 21, verse 22 says, if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

James 1, 5 to 8 says, and we heard this last week, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him.

But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. So there's a bit of an oxymoron there. If you're praying, seeking an answer from God, if you're praying without faith, it doesn't work that way.

[4 : 00] So we need to recognize immediately that if we don't have faith, if we don't trust God, our prayers won't be answered. Does that make sense?

Hebrews 11, verse 6 says, It seems like a pretty basic common sense, right?

If we're praying to someone and we kind of believe in him, why would he answer our prayers? Does that make sense? Right? So reaching out to God saying, Oh Lord, I kind of believe in you.

Would you answer my prayer? What? I kind of think you'll do this. I'm not positive, but I'm told that I'm going to pray, so I'm going to do that.

What? So it's faith, something that we need. Now this is the encouraging part. Well, I can't manage to have that faith.

[5 : 08] Well, you're not asked to. We consider, a lot of times, I think, that we need to somehow muster the faith to believe. Muster the faith to trust God.

But do we have to do that on our own? No. Romans 10, verse 17 tells us, So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

So with God's word as our guide, we can have faith that then pleases God, and will help to ensure an answer to our prayers. God gives us the path and the steps to follow to be able to come to him in faith, in prayer.

So the second principle of prayer is that we must pray with humility. And that involves two aspects. It involves both humility before God, recognizing who he is, and humility in our prayers themselves. So Isaiah 57, verse 15 says, For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, and we often sing those words, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

[6 : 25] I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Humility. Isaiah 66, continuing in there, Isaiah 66, verses 1 and 2, says, Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.

What is the house that you would build for me, and what is my place of rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord.

But, hear this, This is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

Humility. Psalm 34, verse 18, says that the Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.

[7 : 28] Proverbs 3, verse 34, says, Toward the scorers, he is scornful, but to the humble, he gives favor.

So we can see here that humility before God is a virtue that God himself values in his people. But we're also called, as I said, to be humble in the act of prayer.

So not only humble before God as we come to him to pray, but humble in the act of prayer itself. In his parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke, Jesus makes it very clear that the attitude of seeking attention and recognition is absolutely the wrong way to approach prayer.

And I believe you would have noticed that. So as we read in Luke 18, verse 14, it's clear that Jesus says, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

But the one who humbles himself will be exalted. So there's that reversal in the kingdom of God. It's contrary to what we perceive as value in the world.

[8 : 48] And as James 4, verse 10 says, Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

So by approaching God with first faith and then humility, it's only then that we're able to and prepared to pray with the proper disposition.

That's the best place to start. So the third principle of prayer is that we must pray in harmony with God's will. So it's important to remember that they may be our prayers.

Certainly they are. But ultimately, it's God's will that we're seeking. And so I don't know about you, but sometimes that can be a challenge. Because I think I talked about this last Sunday.

We can come to God and say, I want so-and-so to be healed. Or I want this to happen for this person. I want this job to happen for this person that I know they're qualified for, that I know will be a blessing for them.

But we hold back. Do you ever find that? You hold back because hopefully it's a balance of, I'm not asking for you to do what I want.

[9 : 59] I'm asking for you to do what I believe is right for this person in this situation, or the circumstances, or whatever it is. And I want to submit this request under your authority, under your will.

Does that make sense? So it's not that we're to pray unconfidently, but we need to pray in the context of the will of God is what we're after.

We want God's will to be done. So 1 John 5, verse 14 is a clear reminder of this, because it says, this is the confidence that we have towards Him.

That if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And so if the primary focus of our prayer is what we want, well, James 4, verse 3 says, you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

And so Jesus taught us to bring our prayers to the Father, not by asking, my will be done, but thy will, God's will be done.

[11:14] In Matthew 6, verses 9 and 10, Jesus prayed, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, in Luke 22, verse 42, Jesus prayed, Father, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.

The Son of God Himself submitted to the Father's will as He prayed. He prayed for what He perceived to be the right thing to do, the right thing to ask, but again, prayed it in submission to the will of the Father.

And ultimately, I think prayer becomes easier when our will is to do God's will. Does that make sense?

I believe there's immense freedom in that. And it may sound like a spiritual cop-out that we're saying, I'm going to pray and ultimately, the result of my prayer, no matter what happens, I will perceive that it's God's will being done so I can kind of take credit for how my prayer shaped God.

[12:34] You see that slippery slope? But there's freedom in our prayer being submitted to God, being submitted under His authority and according to His will.

So it's with faith in God, with humility towards Him, that we become better able to do His will for us. And the fourth principle of prayer is that we must pray with thanksgiving.

Ephesians 5, verse 20, encourages us to be giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In my personal mantra verse, many of you know this, Philippians 4, verse 6, reminds us, worrier, right? Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Colossians 4, verse 2, says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. 1

Thessalonians 5, verse 17 and 18 reminds us to pray without ceasing.

[13:51] Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. That message seems pretty clear, doesn't it?

We're to seek to have an attitude of gratitude, and you've heard me use that kind of phrase over the years. To be people who are always thankful first.

Do we seriously think that God will help us with our present burdens if we don't take time to thank Him for His past blessings?

So the fifth principle is that we must pray in Jesus' name. And this is how Jesus taught His disciples, we are also His disciples, to pray.

In John 14, verses 13 and 14, Jesus says, Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

[14:54] If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. In John 16, verse 23, Jesus says, In that day, you will ask nothing of me.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, He will give it to you. In Ephesians 5, 20, Paul directed the Christians at Ephesus to be giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul got it and passed it on, this model. So praying in the name of Jesus is the model that we have been given, that has been passed down to us.

And it's important to recognize something here. This is not like praying for a meal and simply tagging on in Jesus' name at the end of our prayers.

It's not like a closing salutation. Sincerely, yours, in Jesus' name, Amen. Some kind of last-minute endorsement, right? It's not, I'm praying according to my own will and I hope God likes this and I hope I get what I want for Christmas.

[16:11] It feels like a Christmas list. And in Jesus' name, right? It's like, and I'm just going to put that little tag on the end because that's what I'm supposed to do.

Not exactly. So praying in Jesus' name means that, as Jesus said, He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life.

And no one comes to the Father in the first place except by Him. He's the only way to get there. You can't even come to God in prayer, the Father, without Jesus right with you.

So it means that, as we explored last week, Jesus is our high priest. He intercedes for us. He continues to make a way even to this day for us to approach the Father.

Jesus is the only way in which we can even begin to pray. The only way in which that channel is open to us. Can you see that? It's important to always keep that in mind, that without Jesus, there is no prayer.

[17 : 21] Not in the way that we've been taught. So we've covered a ton of ground this morning. A ton. Maybe it doesn't seem like it, but lots of verses.

Lots of perspective. Lots of, perhaps, correction or enrichment into your understanding of the principles of how we pray. pray. So we need to pray in faith.

We need to pray with humility. We want to pray in harmony with the will of God. We want to pray with thanksgiving. And we want to pray in the name of Jesus.

And so, we can't underestimate the word of God, scripture itself, for how it relates to these principles. Because, as we touched on, faith comes from the word of God.

Humility is learned by reading the word of God. It's impossible to know God's will without the word of God. And it's far easier to be thankful, I believe, when we're reminded in the word of God, in scripture, of the many blessings we have received.

[18 : 35] The blessings that we can and will receive. And it's the word of God that reminds us of the importance of having Jesus interceding for us, mediating with the Father on our behalf.

With God's word to guide and help us in recognizing and observing the principles of prayer, we'll be better equipped to make prayer a truly meaningful and beneficial experience in our lives.

Amen.