

Prayer Part 1

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Date: 20 March 2022

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- [0:00] So, today we're going to start talking about prayer, and I want to start with a confession. When we're talking about Bible intake and reading the Bible, I come at it with a sense of I do know how to read the Bible, which is, you know, I don't read the Bible as well as I might. I don't read the Bible as, you know, consistently as I would like to. I don't, you know, I have all kinds of weaknesses there, but when we come to prayer, I feel even more keenly my weakness is here. So, I don't want to give the impression of being an expert or anything like that, and I feel it's pretty humbling to be teaching on prayer. I feel like I have a whole lot to learn. I feel like, well, I should have learned more by now, but I'm grateful that God has brought me where I am.
- [1:04] So, just hear me with that. I'm not an expert. And so, some of what I'm sharing is things that have helped me. Some of the things I'm sharing I don't do as consistently as I would like to do. I find prayer hard. So, I come at it from that angle. Let's just ask the Lord's blessing on our time. Father, we thank you for the amazing gift of prayer. We pray that you would open our eyes and our ears to see what a wonder it is and to see what a privilege it is. Pray that you would draw near, that you would help us to look at your word and look at what it says and look at some ways that we might strengthen our prayer lives. And Lord, that your Holy Spirit would lead us and teach us. In Jesus' name, amen. So, I'm going to assume that most of us here don't need to be convinced that we ought to pray. But I'll run through a few things, not to neglect that. The first one is, it's expected in Scripture. We see it all over.
- [2:24] We see the saints praying. We hear Jesus as he's introducing, for instance, the Lord's Prayer, but other times as well. He says, and when you pray, and then says what he wants to say about it, not if you pray. It was part of, it's part of religion, right? It's part of, you know, many, many religions. And it's just expected that we're going to participate in this. It's also commanded. And there are, you know, there are a number of places where that's true, although I think the expectation sort of precludes some of the commandments we might have. But here are just two from the New Testament. Continue steadfastly in prayer. And then pray without ceasing. So these are commands that we ought to pray. Continue steadfastly in prayer, prayer, pray without ceasing. They're almost synonymous. I think when we look at prayer, pray without ceasing, we're clearly not going to be on our knees before God 24-7.

[3 : 43] We have other things that God has commanded us to do that we need to do. And we can't always be constantly giving our attention to prayer at the same time as we're giving our attention to whatever he's put before us to do.

But, you know, ideally, and I'm always super grateful when this happens, is we put our minds on what we're doing.

And then there might be a pause or a gap in what we're doing or we're moving on to the next task. And our minds might, you know, under the best of circumstances, our minds will wander to the Lord and, you know, give thanks for what we just did and pray for what we're about to do or whatever it might be.

This is something I long for in my life and have for some time, and I've continued to pray about it, that I would be more focused on the Lord throughout the day.

Like, I have a good time in the morning, but then too often I just go off and do my thing. And God is gracious when I do that.

[4 : 49] But, you know, I'd like to be more in touch. One of the Puritans, I love the Puritans' language because it's just, you know, it's dated.

So it's interesting. And I love words. So one of them, and I can't remember who, I didn't even write this down, but he says, keep close touches with God. And I like that because it is touches, right?

It's, he's always with us, but we're going to, we're going to touch, reach out and touch, you know, on the margins of what we're doing during the day and our busyness. Yeah.

So I like that. And I have seen improvement for myself as I've continued to pray about it and as I've continued to learn better habits in the morning, my morning time, which doesn't need to be morning.

It's just, that's what I do. So that's what praying without ceasing, I think, looks like. The third reason to pray is that he hears us.

[5 : 57] I think this is amazing. It's really struck me over the past couple of years, like, what a wonder that the God of the universe, who is exalted and transcendent, who is eternal, who is omniscient, he knows all things.

He sees into the hearts of every man and woman. He's way different from us in many ways, right? He's God. This is a big deal.

I think we sometimes get comfortable with God as our pal. But think a minute about what it means that he created the heavens and the earth.

And he sustains all that goes on. That he knows what's happening to Plankton X somewhere. And he's aware of that, or it wouldn't be happening.

Like, there's a sense of his bigness that I think is helpful to keep in mind. And then to read the reassurances that he hears us.

[6 : 58] He listens. He pays attention. And when the Bible says hear, it usually means, like, hear, not just hear. Oh, yeah, she's talking again. But hear with a will to respond.

With a, you know, hearing is accepting it, welcoming it, and responding to it. So this verse is the verse that my Echo Dot reads to me every morning, right after my alarm goes off.

But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him. That's amazing. And as I follow him, I'm set apart for him.

And he's listening to me. Yeah, I just, that's amazing. The next one there, Psalm 145. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him.

He also hears their cry and saves them. So as we seek him and fear him in the sense that we look to him for all our needs, we respect and reverence him, we worship him.

- [8 : 11] He hears our cries. And those cries are not always articulate, right? They're not always, yeah, I mean, some of those cries, as we know, are tears, are groans, are just, Lord, help. And he hears all of that. And then in 1 John, and this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.
- And again, hear that hears as hears and responds. He's not just, it's not just flowing over him like, you know, like if I turn on a podcast and then my mind wanders, I'm not hearing it, right?
- And if I read the Bible and just run my eyes over it, I'm not really hearing it either. So it's this hearing with a heart to respond and accept and welcome. So this is how God approaches us.
- And not to make anyone feel guilty, but to consider this amazing privilege that we have to pray and to know that he hears us.
- [9 : 19] And these are just three verses out of hundreds. The Psalms especially are filled with this. The examples we have in Scripture are prayers that expect to be heard, and rightly so.
- And the last one is because we want to pray because we need help. We need it. We need the Lord to help us in all kinds of circumstances.
- We need him to help us on the good days. We need him to help us on the hard days. We need him to help us with things we think we're good at. We need him to help us with things we have no idea what to do.
- We are the created ones. We are created to rely on him. We are created with needs that only he can fill. And he's called us to come to him.
- He knows those needs, but he's invited us to express them to him. And that's what he honors that. And sometimes it might feel a little bit like, if he already knows, why do I need to tell him?
- [10 : 28] But he's interested in more than just... He's interested in cultivating our hearts, right? Our hearts that know that we need him. Our hearts that reach out to him.
- Our hearts that fear him. That honor him for who he is. In all his transcendence and glory and otherness. We want to honor this God who created us and rely on him.
- And we express that reliance in prayer and in other ways. So the writer of Hebrews says, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
- We need mercy, right? We're sinning every day in many different ways. And we need his mercy. We need to seek him for that.
- And to find grace to help in time of need. Now, you know, as I said, we're in time of need all the time. And we need what he can give. So those are just some reasons.
- [11 : 40] Y'all could have come up with those on your own. And, you know, I'm sure there are others that we could add. But I think most of us know that we ought to be praying.
- And that it's a good thing. And I think many of us are praying. I'm not assuming people aren't praying. But I was supposed to say barriers. There's a typo up there.
- Barriers, not borrowers. So some of the ways it's hard. And, again, you can come up with all these from your own experience. And they won't all be the same as these.
- But just some. We're not used to thinking in silence. I think especially in these days when we're bombarded with information. When we have, you know, alarms, alerts going off on our phone.
- When, you know, some people turn the TV on in the morning and never turn it off. And just have it going in the background. Some people need music in the background.

- [12:41] Some people, you know, there's just. And then to sit alone and actually be in silence before the Lord can be really hard.
- I suspect the ancients had it a little easier. Because there wasn't all this noise and confusion and information and bombardment with media and all of that.
- But, nevertheless, this is the problem for many of us. So we're not used to that silence and thinking it's hard to concentrate and stay focused.
- I'm going to assume that many of us have that experience. Because of that, our minds wander. We sit down to pray. And we start thinking about what we need to do in the day.
- Or last night's argument with our spouse. Or our worries about whatever. The bills that need to be paid. We might be thinking about, you know, things we hope for and dream for.
- [13:53] All kinds of things, right? And you can fill in all those blanks with your own, where your mind goes. And this is part of sitting in silence. It's part of, it's just part of having super busy minds filled with all kinds of stuff.
- And it's a challenge. So we're going to hopefully talk about some things that may help that challenge. We bore ourselves.
- Sometimes, you know, you sit down and pray. And it's just like, okay, I did this yesterday. But here I go again. And we tend to say the same thing over and over.
- Because we have the same concerns. Today is not radically different from yesterday. We still want to pray for our families. You know, we still want to pray for things going on in the world, like Ukraine.
- We still want to pray for all kinds of things, right? And it just feels, it gets to feel stale. And it's just, then it becomes boring, right?
- [14:56] And you're kind of like, okay, God, I told you all this yesterday. But again, would you, you know. So again, I hope some of the tips are going to be a little helpful in that regard.
- You know, on the other hand, as long as we're actually praying our concerns, he hears every single, draw my child to yourself, Lord.
- And I may say it pretty much the same way every day. And that's, he hears that. As long as it's not, we don't want to be mindlessly repeating things. And I think it has a lot to do with our motivation.
- Like, if we're just like, it feels the same every day, we're not going to be very motivated to do it every day. And I think, and this is like, we don't often say this, but I think we often actually don't expect God to answer.
- And this is something I've wrestled with in my own life. Like, do I really think God is going to respond to this prayer? And many times in my life, I know I have prayed and walked away assuming nothing's going to happen.
- [16:13] I did what I was supposed to do. I prayed. But I just don't always believe he's going to do it. And there are prayers I've been praying for years. And I don't see him answering.
- And I just expect, well, you know, probably not going to come in at the last minute. So my mother is 90. She turns 91 this month.
- And I've been praying for her salvation for many years. Like 80. Not 80. I'm not 80.
- But 50 years. A little less than that. 48. 48. And I don't see the Lord at work in her.
- I don't see any of that. And she could die, you know, today. I mean, any of us could die today. But, you know, I've prayed for her for a long time and have not seen the Lord work.
- [17:11] So when I pray for her, I really have to wrestle with myself to believe that, yes, he could still save her. And I've read of people saved in their 90s.

So I know it happens, you know. But knowing it in my head because someone else had this experience is not the same as in my heart. And I, so I struggle with that.

I struggle with really believing is God going to answer. And I do see answers to prayer. But I'm also very, I think I'm just cynical about this, which is terrible.

But I think, oh, that was just a coincidence, you know. And God is in control of all those coincidences, right? So, yeah.

Anyway, so some of what, some of these helps I'm going to talk about are hopefully faith building as well as, you know, practical, keeping us from saying the same things every day and that kind of thing.

[18:15] So I have found I need my faith built. I need to remember who he is and that he is all powerful and that he is full of what to us are surprises and unlikely occurrences.

And he loves to work that way. We see all kinds of unlikely things happen throughout scripture. We see unlikely heroes and just unlikely events. And that's our God.

That's what he's like. So I need to, you know, for myself and maybe some of you, I need to strengthen my faith and believe that he really cares and believe that he really can answer.

And when I don't see an answer, that he is answering in a way, right, in ways I don't see usually. Or maybe he's just at work in my heart. And maybe, you know, praying for my mom for all these years is something that's been necessary to build my faith.

You know, so there's a lot we don't know and we don't want to make assumptions that, well, God's just not going to because he's just not going to, you know.

[19:23] So that's something that I personally wrestle with and need to sort of check myself. Do I expect God to answer this? So that's, and I don't think I'm alone in this.

I think many of us experience this. So this is familiar from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus speaking, ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. And the one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened.

Or which one of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who's in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

I think there are a lot of, I think there's a fair amount of mystery in how prayer works and how God responds to prayer.

[20:28] And I'm not going to go into all that today. I think we can acknowledge that there's some mystery. That we are likely to go to our graves with prayers that seem to us to be unanswered.

On the other hand, I love this passage in that it points me to a father who loves me. And I have children.

And, you know, I mean, if one of them came and asked me for bread, I'm not going to send him out to the woods to find a stone. I mean, that's not going to happen. And I'm not, like, the best person in the world.

So God is. And he's going to give us good things. And so keeping the character of God in mind, this verse helps me. It is a promise that we can depend upon.

Yeah. Enough about that. It's a big topic. It's not enough in that that solves everything for me or anyone else. But, yeah, I want to acknowledge it as sometimes an issue.

[21:34] And say that I do think there are answers. But I don't always know what they are. So some more practical things.

Not that that stuff is not practical. But we talked last week about meditation. And I mentioned this then. And I'll mention it again. And I'm going to mention it again next week. As we meditate on scripture.

Remember, we choose a verse or passage. And we go over it in our minds. In our notebooks. On a whiteboard.

Whatever works for us. We go over it. And let the words really sink in. What does this mean? What does it imply?

Why is this word here? Why this word and not that other word? Word by word. The example we did last week was choosing one word at a time to emphasize and think about in a given verse.

[22:44] And the insights that can flow from that, I think we saw. There's just a lot. And you could keep going for a long time on that. It's especially fun in a group because you have all kinds of different minds to do that.

But what I've found is I've spent more time meditating in scripture is that it just evolves naturally into prayer. I'm going to give you an example that isn't me.

So I mentioned, I think, in the first class, George Mueller and his autobiography. He includes this sort of an explanation of how he learned a better pattern for his morning devotions.

He is well known, in case you don't know, for answered prayers, for ministering to orphans in 19th century England and relying on God for every financial need and every other need.

And he was a man who prayed and saw dramatic answers. So I'm going to listen to things that he learned.

[23:58] And so he describes that he had a longstanding habit at the time of his writing. He said for the past 10 years, a longstanding habit of getting up from bed and going right to prayer.

But he would get up from bed. And some of this I'm paraphrasing and inserting some of my own experience. He doesn't actually say it was sleepy, but, you know, one is sleepy many times when one wakes up.

But he expresses that it would take him 15 minutes or 30 minutes to kind of get into it. And I think, I don't know if I need to explain that, but just the sense of you can say words but not really be praying.

And it's hard, right? It just feels like you're repeating things mindlessly or you're really trying to say them meaningfully, but you're just not.

It just doesn't feel like it's there, right? And something that goes on in our hearts, I think God is listening from the very get-go as soon as we wake up. But we wake up, we don't necessarily feel spiritual.

[25:13] And it would take him some time. And this is, again, you know, this is this guy who's like a paragon of prayer for many of us. And he found this to be a problem.

So he would stick in there for 15 or 30 minutes or however long it took until he was really praying. Now, he's going to find a different way to do this, and I'm going to describe that.

But I think about this, and I think, how often do I give it 30 minutes? I give up. I mean, 30 minutes, that seems like a long time to really struggle.

And I don't have that much time in the morning. So it's like, well, I tried, Lord. And I don't get to that point of sensing his comfort, his encouragement, his presence.

And we're not always, we can't really go by our feelings, but we long to have that, right, that sense of connection. But it's really hard to wait that long.

[26:17] Now, George Mueller did, presumably, habitually. One old saint, and I can't remember who it was, of course, he said, pray until you pray.

And that's that idea of, you know, you get past just the saying the words and really speak to the Lord. And that can take time. And the less we pray, the more time it's going to take.

So Mueller had this experience, just as we might. And he discovered a better way to approach his prayer time. He began with Bible reading and meditation.

And as he meditated, he found much opportunity, quite naturally, to turn to prayers of confession, intercession, praise, petition.

He got himself into a position to fuel his prayers with the word of God. This is what meditation does for us, Bible reading and meditation.

[27:22] It provides the fuel we need for prayer. Now, this is a long quote from George Mueller, but I find it very helpful. He says, now, what is food for the inner man?

Not prayer, but the word of God. And here again, not the simple reading of the word of God so that it only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe. But considering that we, considering what we read, pondering over it and applying it to our hearts.

Let's try and track it here. Where am I? When we pray, we speak to God. Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire.

And the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed, is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the word of God.

Where we find our father speaking to us to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us.

[28:34] We may, therefore, profitably meditate with God's blessing, though we are ever so weak spiritually. Nay, the weaker we are, the more we need meditation for the strengthening of our inner person.

Thus, there is less to be feared from wandering of mind than if we give ourselves to prayer without having had time previously for meditation. So, a lot of words there, but just the idea that we need fuel for prayer, and we get that from the word of God.

And as I have done this more and more, my prayer life has dramatically improved. As I meditate on a passage of scripture, different things will come to mind.

I'll realize I have a sin here to confess. I'll see something that I really want in my own life and pray for it. I might be reminded of someone else who's under a circumstance like this and pray for them.

This morning, this morning, I read Psalm 140. And David is, as so often, he's in a fight.

[29:50] It feels like he's losing. And one of the things that came to my mind was the people of Ukraine. And I prayed for them as I was reading through this, because I don't feel embattled in a particular way.

Didn't feel that this morning. But I know people who are really, literally embattled and losing lives and losing loved ones. And it's just so brutal and heartbreaking.

But I prayed for them in that context. I prayed, you know, that the Lord would. And some of that Psalm is like, make the evil stop. That's not a quote, but essentially.

And so I prayed that. Anyway, so that's just an example of how these things can come to your mind. And you can be praying them even as you read and meditate. But it gives you the fuel that you need for this hard work of prayer.

And we wake up and we're not typically ready to do that hard work right away. And we need the Lord's strength. We need his grace, his mercy, and his help in prayer.

[30:59] And he gives that through his word. It also can build our faith as we read his word and we remember who he is. If I spend time worshiping God through meditation, then I'm far more likely to believe this God can answer my prayer.

This God cares about me. This God is powerful enough to save my mother. So, yeah.

So I have just found this really, really helpful. And Mueller goes on to say he found it very helpful. So I feel like I'm in good company there.

And we're going to talk a little bit more next week about, specifically about praying through a Bible passage. Which is, you know, for me, it's often connected.

All these lines kind of begin to blur from Bible reading to meditation to prayer. And I'll find myself sort of cycling through. Reading, stopping at something that I really want to think about, you know, and then focusing on that, meditating on that for a brief time.

[32:10] And then that turns into prayer. And then I go back to the passage. Like that sometimes happens. Sometimes I do all the reading and then I focus on something from that or from somewhere else to meditate on.

But when I just tried in the past to pray, my mind was everywhere and my heart was everywhere.

And it was really hard to focus. The words in scripture helped me to focus my attention. Another thing that can help, I wrote down journal here.

I thought about and probably should just amend it to writing things down. So it doesn't sound so, you know, I don't want it to sound like I have to start a journal. Which can feel like a big chore and not really of interest.

But it can be as simple as having a notebook nearby to write down a few things as you meditate on God's word. And a few things you were prompted to pray for as you meditated. For me, it goes generally, loosely.

[33:19] Reading, meditating. And then I do some of that in writing. Because then again, that helps me to focus my attention on the words as I write them.

So, you know, I'll write down a verse that I really want to focus on that morning. And I'll be meditating on it. And some of that will just be writing.

I'll just be writing. And for me, thoughts flow really well when I have a pen in my hand. And that's not going to be true for everyone. I recognize that. But something about writing something down does give us like an anchor point to return our attention to if our mind wanders.

It gives us something not quite concrete, but something visible, something we can look at. It can also be something we look back at maybe at the end of the day and think about.

And then often as I'm meditating, that just turns into prayer. And I'll often write those down as well. And I didn't do that for many, many years. I kept a journal for off and on most of my life.

[34:31] But I didn't start writing prayers until a few years ago. And it's been really, really helpful. Again, it anchors me. It gets me started.

I'll sometimes start not knowing what I'm going to say. Like, that's those times when I'm just like, I don't feel like praying. I just, you know, but I'll usually like have a verse written down or something, a phrase, something, and just start.

And sometimes I don't even have that. Like, I've read my Bible. I just don't feel like there's anything there I really want to think about. Like, I'm tired or I have something else on my mind. Whatever that is.

And I'll just start writing sometimes. You know, some boring sentence will start it off. Like, wow, I don't really feel like praying today. Like, I might start that way and just offer that to God.

And then as I find starting is the hardest part. And as I get going, the Lord brings things to mind. He is faithful. If we desire to commune with him, we ask for his help.

[35:35] You know, and we ought to be asking for his help, you know, when our minds wander or whatever like that. We ought not to be beating ourselves up, I don't think, if our minds wander.

I don't think that's helpful. But trying to give ourselves some anchor points that we can bring our minds back to and build that habit of concentration. And it is a habit, and it's one often we don't have.

We're not building it in our daily lives because they're so full of interruption and noise and so on. So for me, writing things down helps a lot.

Sometimes I don't write something down every day. Sometimes I just don't, you know, I got up late and I don't have time and I move on.

And I'm okay with that. But often I do. I try to find something to key in on. Okay.

[36:40] This is something that in the class that I took at seminary, Dr. Whitney, he gets, so I've given you, I've given you a handout, said, why should God answer your prayers?

And he encouraged us to, whenever we pray, always have a reason for God to answer. Now, this isn't, this isn't to convince him.

I don't think, like, that doesn't make sense to me. But, but as we, we turned him, we see this throughout scripture of saints praying and pointing to why, why?

That your name would be glorified. That your word would go forth. Because I belong to you. That was one in this morning, in Psalm 140.

It was, in one verse, David anchors it in his relationship with God. So, I've listed a bunch here.

[37:46] They all come off the sheet. All of the Bible references are on your sheet. And I'm not going to go through all of that. But, I think there are two things that this does.

First, it guards our prayers from praying selfishly. And, you know, with mixed motives. All of our prayers will be with mixed motives.

I'll just say that. But, but it helps. And it forces us to really think about, well, why should God answer this prayer? And, how might, how might he be glorified in this situation?

And, he talks, you know, under Roman numeral one, they're the general reason. We need to belong to him.

We need to be his people. That's who he listens to. It's his people. So, we need to be sure that we are in relationship with him. That we are trusting him for our salvation.

[38:54] We want to check ourselves for any sin that's preventing us from having answers from God.

He will withhold if he wants to convict us of some sin. And, we need to fix something. And, I think we usually know what that is.

I think he is faithful to bring us that conviction. Yeah. Yeah. So, those are just sort of general caveats.

And, then some of these reasons. And, again, the references. I've just turned them into a question. Has he promised to answer this prayer? There are so many promises in the scripture.

And, we need to be careful not to take a promise that was given to a particular individual in a particular situation. And, assume it's for us. We need to read our Bibles carefully.

[39 : 49] And, understand that not every promise is directed in a general way. But, there are plenty of promises in scripture.

And, we can claim those. Yeah. I just. And, that will fuel our faith. If we realize, well, God promised this.

He keeps his promises. That's who he is. So, we think about that. Is there a promise that I can be praying for? Would it be according to his revealed character to answer?

Here, he talks about where an attribute of God is given as a reason God should answer. Lord, you are merciful. You know, please forgive me.

And, we know. And, there's a promise for that. That he is faithful and just to forgive us when we confess our sins. And, it's according to his character. We know that he is a merciful and faithful God.

[40 : 52] You know, does it comport with his holiness? Does it. Yeah. Any number of attributes.

Does this seem to be in line with who God is? It's the kind of thing he would do. Might be another way to think of it. And, again. We're not always going to know precisely.

But, think about. Will it bring him glory? Will others praise him? Will I praise him more? Will this person I'm praying for praise him more? Will his glory be greater?

That is, the knowledge of who he is. And, his beauty enhanced in people's eyes. Will it bring him glory? Will an answer point people to God?

God. And, you know, I think, I think in many cases we can look at this and say, God, look what people will see.

[41 : 53] And, they will see who you are. I will give you praise for this. David often says, I'll give you praise for this. I'll, you know, I'll praise you in the sanctuary. He's going to declare what God has done.

And, people who weren't involved in that or who, you know, just members of the congregation are going to hear that. And, their faith is going to be encouraged. And, they're going to look to God and say, well, you did it for him.

Would you do it for me? And, that glorifies him. Will it bear witness to those who are unbelievers? Will it make people stand up and notice something and be pointed to God?

Can we look to our relationship with him as a reason? I mentioned that before. Lord, I am your child. You are my father. Would you give me this good gift?

And, we, I mean, he delights in us as his children. He loves us as his children. And, we can, we can claim that.

[42 : 58] We can claim, look, I'm your child. And, you are a good father. And, ask for things like that.

Will it help us or others be obedient to God? Will it lead to greater holiness in my life? In someone else's life? Will it be encouraging?

Will it strengthen my faith? Will it strengthen that other person's faith? And, then finally, and these are not in any particular order, is it according to his will?

And, we know that there are many promises in scripture that are key to his will. And, sometimes we know his will, right? We know, we don't maybe know in a particular situation exactly, but we know, we know what he's like.

Again, this goes back to his attributes and his promises and what brings him glory. And, this can help us. And, we can say, Lord, you have said it is your will.

- [44 : 05] And, pray. So, he talks about then on the handout, praying this way is valuable to us. In that it helps us pray more effectively, though it doesn't obligate or manipulate God.
- That's not what we're trying to do. It helps us pray with more faith and eagerness. This is where I've found this. I've found this to be really faith building. As I was saying before, sometimes I just feel like, well, God's not going to do anything anyway.
- But, if I'm looking to his word and I'm seeing these promises, or I'm seeing, well, but this is what God's like. He'll do this. You know? It helps us pray with a better understanding of the character of God.
- That's kind of the same thing. Helps us to pray less flippantly and selfishly. If we're checking our motives, you know, is this really for God's glory? Is it just for my comfort? Is it, you know, because, is it just something I want?
- Is it, is this coming out of my ambition? Is it coming out of, you know, yeah, whatever. How we feel about ourselves or what we think others think about us or whatever.
- [45 : 14] There can be a million selfish reasons for prayer. Yeah, so, so that's, those are the, those are some reasons.
- And, and again, you can write these things down as part of your prayer, which again gives you an anchor point and reminds you of what you're praying. Yeah.
- Yeah. So I did want to tell one story that's sort of related to this. So during the, during the course of the seminary class that I took during eight weeks, and I knew this ahead of time, Dr. Whitney had us engaging in a number of spiritual disciplines.
- And one of them was evangelism. He has a chapter in his book on that. And I knew that one of our responsibilities would be, through the course of the, through the course of the course, the class, we were keeping a journal, because journaling was one of the, one of the disciplines.
- And we had to have, there were certain required entries. So I had to have an entry describing my sharing the gospel with someone within that eight weeks.
- [46 : 28] Now, I am not around unbelievers very much. I work here at the church, so I cross paths with some unbelievers who come in, but it's not really that frequent that I have really a conversation.
- They're on their way to meet with someone else, or, or they're not on their way anywhere, and they don't want to stand around and talk. I've been in many situations where I was with non-Christians, but there just wasn't a, there just wasn't a, it wasn't the kind of setting where you would be sharing the gospel.
- For a number of years, I studied karate, and I would go to these classes, and, and these people became my friends, and I prayed for them, but there was very little opportunity to say more than, you know, yeah, I've been praying about that, or just, just enough to say something about my faith, but, but there were not opportunities.
- We were busy learning how to defend ourselves. So, and during this class, like, they're just, this is my life, right?
- And, and, and A, maybe I need to fix that, and I, and that's something to think about, and I continue to think about that. But B, okay, Lord, I have eight weeks, and I'm supposed to do this, but clearly this is according to, is it not your will?
- [47 : 54] Would it not glorify you? Would this not point someone to Jesus? Would it not help me be obedient? All of this, I thought, well, of course he's going to answer this prayer.
- So I began praying, and I got to say, I did not pray daily. I meant to, but I didn't. And I just prayed for an opportunity to share the gospel, and that I would be ready and take the opportunity.

And I went through those eight weeks, most of them, looking for that opportunity, and I really did have confidence that he would bring this to me.

I worried a little that my motives were a little mixed up, because, you know, it was for a class, it was an assignment, and, you know, I want to get an A. But at the same time, and I acknowledge that, you know, but at the same time, I really did want to be able to do this, and I really did believe it would bring him glory.

Not me to get an A, but me to have an opportunity to share the gospel with someone. So I asked a number of other people to pray along with me, and I just kept praying.

[49:10] And I had at least one moment where I thought, this is it, this is God's answer. And I was on the beach on Cape Cod during vacation, and I had been sitting, I was doing another assignment for the course, which was four hours of silence and solitude.

So I had been sitting by myself, praying and reading scriptures, and I was far enough away that I could sing a little bit. It was early morning, and the beach was not crowded, and it was September. But, and then I had bicycled there, and then I was walking back up the beach to bicycle to another location where I would continue this, and I prayed as I biked.

But I was walking up the beach, and there was this woman sitting there in what appeared to be like a wheelchair, but it was these giant, it was a sand wheelchair.

So she was sitting there, and she spoke to me, and I don't remember the whole conversation, but she said something like, lovely day, or something, I don't know.

And so I'm like, okay, here's a perfect stranger. I'm not in a rush. Like, she's just sitting there. She's probably not going off for a jog. And so I just engaged in conversation, as I might have anyway.

[50:36] But she said something, I don't know. She was talking about what her family, they were off on a walk, and she was here, and she had this, I don't know.

It was just some things about, you know, why she was there and what was going on in her family, and nothing deeply personal, just a little, yeah. And I mostly listened, and I thought, she seems maybe kind of lonely.

I just listen. And then she said, well, well, I don't want to keep you. You've got things to do. And I said, well, actually, I was just, really, I was actually just spending some time alone with God.

And, you know, it was just a beautiful day and a beautiful place to be praying and praising him. And she looked at me, and she said, what did she say?

It was something about the environment. It was something about, yes, we need to take care of the environment. And I thought, okay, that wasn't exactly the opening I was looking for.

[51:36] And I was just, you know, that was pretty much, I said, yes, we do need to take care of it, and isn't it beautiful?

And then I moved on, because it just wasn't a conversation. She was, it was not a conversation that was going to turn into something as far as I could see. And I really had been alert, eager, trying. So I have this experience, and I go, okay, Lord, I thought that was it, but I guess it wasn't.

And, I mean, you know, I said something about him, but I didn't share the gospel. So I had that experience, and that was fairly late in the class, and I was beginning to think, is God, I was beginning to doubt, I was beginning to think, God, are you really going to answer this?

You know, we're out of eight weeks, we were maybe in week seven. And then, so I, anyway, what happened?

He did answer the prayer. So what happened, and it might have been in the last week, I don't know, it was under the wire. My, I have an aunt who is not a believer, and who is curious about all of life, and brilliant, and delightful, and I love her to pieces.

[52:53] I have shared the gospel with her, and she's like, you know, yeah. She loves it that I have this, but it's just not, you know.

Well, that's not how I see it. It's kind of like her response. And she doesn't see God as a personal God, and so on. Anyway, she texted me, which is all she does.

She doesn't email. She doesn't, she texted me and asked me, I should have looked it up, what exactly she asked me. Do you remember? She asked, can you explain? And then it was something, and I was like, oh, I guess this is where I share the gospel, because her question was very much out there, like, why do people believe this, or what, it was something about Christianity, and...

It was the difference between religions. The difference between religions, thank you. Dave has a much better memory than I do. What's the difference between all these different religions? And I'm like, okay. And I ended up calling her, we had a long conversation, every conversation with her is long, but...

And, you know, and I answered her question, and tried to explain how Christianity was different, and did explain the gospel, and so that was my opportunity, and I took it.

[54:11] I have not seen particular fruit from that, but she is very curious about many things, and she's in her late 80s, so I'm also praying for her, as well as my mom.

But, so that was, I saw that. I hope I wasn't testing God in a negative way, but I was like, okay, I'm stepping out on faith that this will happen.

And I was, I did enough extra credit in the class that I was willing to skip that entry, if need be, and, you know, I still would have been fine, grade-wise, so it wasn't, the grade did not hinge on that.

But I just saw it as an opportunity. We had read the biography of George Mueller, written by someone else, not his autobiography, but a biography, and I just said, God, you answered all these prayers.

He prayed for bread, and bread came to the door right before breakfast, you know, and he prayed for money, and the exact amount he needed for that bill came in. So, example after example, and I'm like, Lord, you can give me an opportunity to share the gospel.

[55:19] And I returned to that prayer. Now that I'm long past the class, I continue to return to that prayer, because it is something that we know God delights in having his word shared, and it doesn't always come naturally to me or easily, but, yeah.

Anyway, yeah, so I saw God answer. It was hard. It was a test, and I did have doubts, but the Lord answered. And I would encourage you, you know, not to, you know, again, not a test of God, like, you know, are you really faithful?

Not really that, but just, you know, what is there that you've been praying for that you're kind of not sure he's going to answer, but you really believe it's according to his will? Maybe take a little firmer stance on that, and pray it more regularly, and give him the reasons, and build up your faith, because I think he responds to, well, I know he responds to our prayers, and he responds to our faith, and he encourages us, and he builds our faith, and if we're weak in faith, we need to ask him for help, and ask him to build our faith.

So those are just some things about prayer. It's not like the whole thing. Next week, we're going to talk specifically about praying the Bible, and that will be the close of the class. But, yeah, so that's what I got.

Any questions? There were a few other things I might have mentioned, but, you know, it doesn't matter. There are many helps to prayer, like there are books with written prayers that you can sometimes use.

[57:01] There are apps that will sort of keep track of who you're praying for, and recycle them at different, you know, if I want to pray for this person once a week. Yeah, Tyler. Thank you so much for encouraging us to persevere in prayer.

And that last point just reminded me of the parable of the persistent widow. Continue to knock. Continue to knock. And Jesus lifts that widow up. Like, be like that widow. Yeah. Continue to knock, even though it might not seem like God's not answering your prayer, but persevere.

And I was reminded of, you know, when someone's really good at something, you'll ask them to teach you to do it. So, like a master expositor, like, teach me to read the Bible like you do.

Yeah. And the disciples asked Jesus, teach us how to pray, because you do it so well. And he teaches them the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11. And it's just amazing how, like, even Jesus himself was, like, George Mueller is just like an echo of Jesus who was the master prayer warrior who would get alone with his father.

And even the Lord's Prayer is just a wonderful example of praying God's will. Yeah. Of reminding God to do the things, to fulfill his promises, our daily bread, and that kind of thing.

[58:15] So, but thank you. I just wanted to comment. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and that's, I mean, that's something else I've done, is, like, just take the Lord's Prayer and just go, you know, sort of petition by petition or section by section and not just read the words or pray the words, but think about, well, what is this, you know, what can I pray for this under this?

Give us this day our daily bread. I'm on a low-carb diet. I don't eat bread. But there are things I need, right? And so that's a great model in that way, but it's also praying the scripture.

We'll talk about it more next week. But, yeah, that's great. Yeah. Someone else? Amos?

Nobody else has a question. This was in a bedtime story with our kids last night. I was just talking a little bit about prayer, and I realized that I wasn't clear on all the differences between the way an Old Testament saint would have prayed and a new, like, what did the cross really change in terms of, because before the cross, people did pray, but the temple still meant something concrete with regards to prayer.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And I think some of that question, I think, is relevant for us today to consider when we read about the way that people prayed in the Old Testament, how much, I mean, I've never heard anybody say that none of that still, you know, none of that has become obsolete or anything.

[59:55] Right. But nevertheless, there are some differences. But I realized I couldn't really, like, could you not confess in a prayer? Did you have to go to the temple for that?

I don't think that's right. Anyway. Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think we have, I think we have examples. You know, David writing the Psalms, those were prayers, and he was not necessarily in the temple offering them.

And he would look forward to being in the temple and offering them. But I think he wasn't necessarily. I think, you know, I think a genuine relationship with the Lord as we have, but perhaps not as full because now we have the Holy Spirit, was certainly possible in the Old Testament.

I see, I think of Hezekiah receiving these demands from the enemy and bringing the letter before God and saying, look, look, look, he's making fun of you.

You have to do something for us. And, and I think those are ways we pray. I think God has always honored the prayer, the sincere heart, whether, whether it goes through the temple and all that kind of stuff.

[61:14] I think they had those, they had those kinds of anchor points that were helpful, but I don't think they were required in terms of having a relationship with God because, I mean, if you were a male Jew, you went and you lived not in Jerusalem, but some distance away, you went maybe three times a year.

And I know I need help more than three times a year. So I think there was, you know, there was prayer other times. I don't know if that helps at all. It's not something I've thought about a lot.

Yeah. Good. Well, thank you. And go pray. Pray.