

Prayers of Praise and Promise

2 Samuel 7:18-29

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People like to pray. A Pew Survey reports 55% of Americans say they pray every day. That includes 20% of those who consider themselves non-religious and 6% of atheists who pray every day. I am not quite sure to whom those atheists are praying. Only 23% of people say they seldom or never pray. So, when folks on Facebook say, “I am praying for you,” they are likely telling the truth!

Prayer is something people do. **Yet, it seems many Christians feel dissatisfied with how they pray – at least that is true of pastors.**

A Lifeway Survey found that only 16% of Protestant pastors are very satisfied with their personal prayer life. Yes, 47% reported they were somewhat satisfied, which leaves 30% somewhat dissatisfied and 7% admitting they were very dissatisfied with their prayer life.

The bottom line seems to be that there is plenty of room for improvement. And folks, that is certainly true of my prayer life. And I suspect that is true for many of you as well.

What troubles us about our prayers? Well, I suspect one thing is length. Now, brevity in public prayers is often a virtue, a good thing. However, when we are praying in private, it seems “longer” is usually a good thing.

I have read accounts of great Christian leaders who would spend hours on their knees praying. That is not me. In college, I was part of a 24-hour prayer vigil. I had signed up to pray for thirty minutes – from 11:30pm to midnight. I was very pleased to do that but found that after about five minutes, I had covered all the things on the suggestion sheet for which we should pray. So, I came up with some things on my own, and that lasted another five minutes. I then, frankly, just tried to stay awake for the next twenty.

Friends, a few months ago, we explored Luke 11 and what is called the Lord’s Prayer. I noted that the #1 expert the world has ever seen on prayer is Jesus. What He taught us about prayer is important.

The second best teacher on prayer, I think, is David, the shepherd boy who became the great king of Israel. David teaches us about prayer, not through a lesson he gives on this topic, but by example. We probably have more prayers of David’s recorded in the Bible than we do of everyone else put together. Most of those are found in the book of Psalms.

Yet, there is a very important prayer in our text today. Our journey through the book of 2 Samuel brings us to 7:18-29 (page 259). Here we find King David’s prayer after the Lord has given him a magnificent promise. As people who have also received magnificent promises from the Lord, this provides an excellent model of prayer for us. Let’s pause and pray the Lord would use His Word to help us grow as pray-ers this morning.

Okay, quick review of the first part of chapter 7. This we explored last week, and it is essential if we are to understand this passage. David is enjoying God’s blessing as king of Israel. Wanting to express gratitude, honor the Lord and perhaps impress people around him, David decides he should build a house for the Lord, a temple.

The Lord, through the Prophet Nathan, tells him, “No, you are not going to build me a house. #1 – I don’t need a house. I am God, the Creator of the entire universe.”

And more important, it is not you who will build a house for me, but I will build a house for you. No, it will not be a four-bedroom, split level. Rather, it will be a royal dynasty. The House of David. A descendant of David will rule as king not just for a hundred years, not just for a thousand, but forever.

Now, we know this promise will be fulfilled through the Lord Jesus, the descendant of David who is the eternal King of kings. But David lived 1,000 years before Jesus was born and could not even imagine how God’s promises would be kept. Yet, the Lord told him:

2 Samuel 7:16 – “Your house and kingdom will endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever.”

In response to this magnificent promise, David prays. **In the first part of his prayer, David offers praise to God for who He is and what He has already done.**

2 Samuel 7:18 – Then King David went in, sat in the LORD’s presence, and said, “Who am I, Lord GOD, and what is my house that you have brought me this far?”

Grace. David is beginning to understand it is all about grace. It is not about what he does for God, but what God does for him.

2 Samuel 7:19-20a – “What you have done so far was a little thing to you, Lord GOD, for you have also spoken about your servant’s house in the distant future. And this is a revelation for mankind, Lord GOD. What more can David say to you?”

David feels genuine gratitude. And he does end up having more to say. First, he acknowledges God’s greatness:

2 Samuel 7:22 – “This is why you are great, Lord GOD. There is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, as all we have heard confirms.”

Second, he notes the wonderful work God has done in saving the people of Israel.

2 Samuel 7:23-24 – God came to one nation on earth in order to redeem a people for himself.... “You established your people Israel to be your own people forever, and you, LORD, have become their God.”

Friends, many times in the Bible – especially in the book of Psalms – we are told to give praise and thanksgiving to God. That is something most Christians do. We often say something like this:

“Lord, we praise You for who You are and thank You for what You have done for us.”

Or maybe we put it this way:

“God is great, God is good. Let us thank Him for our food.”

Or sometimes, either at church or maybe even in private, phrases like, “Praise You, Lord; and thank You, Jesus!” come out of our mouths.

Now, friends, don’t misunderstand. These are all good things. If you pray, “God is great, God is good. Let us thank Him for our food” at every meal and genuinely mean it, you are likely doing way better than many of us in this room.

Yet, the prayer model we see here involves expanding a bit on those thoughts:

“Lord, there are specific reasons why we know You are great and specific reasons why we know You are good.”

And, as David prays, both here and other places in the Bible, he articulates those reasons. For example:

Psalm 96:3-6 – “Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples. For the LORD is great and is highly praised; he is feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.”

Folks, what I am saying is that it is a good idea and practice to express praise to God, not just “for who He is,” but for specific aspects of His being and character. It is a good idea to thank God not just “for all You have done for us,” but for specific things He has given and done for us.

Why should we do that? Well, it will make our prayers longer; and as I said, longer prayers in private are often good for our souls.

There are a couple more substantial reasons, however:

1) As we recount specific aspects of who God is and what He has done, it causes us to grow in our love for the Lord.

Or at least it does so as we reflect on the specific aspects of God’s character and actions.

In his book, “Knowing God,” J.I. Packer begins with this quote from Pastor Charles Spurgeon:

I believe the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity (Yet, nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Glorious Trinity.) And, while humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory...Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of God.

Those words are from a sermon Spurgeon delivered at the Park Street Chapel in London when he was nineteen years old.

Friend, I would encourage you to commit the time to reading either Packer's “Knowing God” or A.W. Tozer's “Knowledge of the Holy.” Then, use what you learn about God's nature and character to fuel your love for the Lord and to help you praise God more specifically for who He is.

Besides contemplating who God is, we need to focus our minds on what He has done for us through Jesus – specifically through Jesus' death and resurrection. In other words, we need to focus on the gospel.

David praised God (verse 23) for what He had specifically done for His people Israel – redeeming them from slavery in Egypt. That was a wonderful act, but really just a shadow of what the Lord has done for His people, both Jews and Gentiles – delivering us from slavery to sin and death – specifically thanking God for all He has accomplished through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

One of the things I hope you are picking up here at CBC is that there are all sorts of ways we as Christians benefit from what Jesus has done for us and all sorts of reasons for us to give thanks and grow in love for the Lord.

The second reason for praising God for specific aspects of His character and thanking Him for specific things He has done is because, I believe, God takes pleasure in this.

Friend, it is encouraging if your spouse or the person whom you are dating or a good friend says, “I think you are a wonderful person and I appreciate what you have done for me.” However, if that other person says that repeatedly, without ever giving specific reasons why he/she thinks you are wonderful and is grateful to you, the words often start to lose their significance. You may start to question that person's sincerity – thinking their words are rather empty or maybe are intended to manipulate you in some way.

I believe thoughtful praise and thanksgiving that highlights specific aspects of God's character and what He has done for us through Christ is often more honoring to the Lord than just continually uttering phrases like, “Praise the Lord,” and “Thank You, Jesus.” Those wonderful words can become merely vain repetitions if we are not thinking about why we are praising and thanking Him. In our individual lives and in the church, we will improve as pray-ers if we praise God for specific qualities of His being and character and thank Him for specific things He has done for us through the Lord Jesus.

Okay, that's important, but the bulk of David's prayer in this passage is not praise and thanksgiving, but involves affirming God's promises by seeming to “remind” the Lord of words He has spoken. Listen:

2 Samuel 7:25-26a – Now, LORD God, fulfill the promise forever that you have made to your servant and his house. Do as you have promised, so that your name will be exalted forever.

And then:

2 Samuel 7:27b-28 – “You said, ‘I will build a house for you.’ Therefore, your servant has found the courage to pray this prayer to you.

Lord GOD, you are God; your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now, please bless your servant's house so that it will continue before you forever. For you, Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing your servant's house will be blessed forever.'"

Now, like many of us, much of David's prayer is not praise and thanksgiving, but petition, supplication or requests. He is basically asking the Lord to protect and provide for his house, his dynasty, and his descendants – so they will be able to rule, not just for a long time, but forever. This seems like an incredible request.

It is even more remarkable than if I were to ask the Lord to put a brand new, paid-for, not stolen Mercedes in my garage tomorrow morning. Yet, there is one huge difference. David is asking God to do something He has promised to do. Asking God to make a Mercedes suddenly appear is not something He has promised to do.

David is praying, "Lord, I am asking you to do this. I am making this bold request, but this is something You have promised to David." And David is implying, "Lord, since You have made this promise, I am confident this is what You will, indeed, do."

This points to a couple of important truths we need to keep in mind as we think about prayer:

1st – God promises to answer prayers which are "according to His will."

1 John 5:14-15 – This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him.

What a great promise! Yet, there is that condition: **"If we ask anything according to his will."**

Now, don't misunderstand – we are free to ask God for anything we want when we pray. There is nothing wrong with doing that. Yet, we always need to remember the answer to our prayers is determined not by our desires, but by God's. By His will. Jesus provides a great model for prayer

when He is in the Garden of Gethsemane, the day before He was crucified:

Luke 22:42 – "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me – (meaning – allow me to avoid the agony of the cross) – nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."

So, what does this have to do with David's prayer? He is asking God to do things according to His will. How does David know these things are God's will? Because God Himself has said this is His will. These are promises He has made.

When David asks the Lord to make his house an eternal dynasty, he is confident the Lord will answer that prayer because this is something God has promised to do.

Some of you are thinking, "But Pastor Dan, I don't get it. Why do we have to ask God to do what He has already promised? That almost seems like a lack of faith."

Well, friends, remember the Lord always knows what we are going to ask for before we ask it. In fact, He knew that a trillion years ago. He wants us to express our request as an indication of our dependence on Him.

God's plan includes both good things for us and our prayers for those good things. Prayers for God to fulfill His promises are part of how He chooses to fulfill those promises. David's prayers for God to do what He said He would do are part of how God chooses to do it.

This is true for promises the Lord has made to us.

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) Whenever we feel alone, we can pray, remind God of this promise and be confident He will keep His word and be there beside us.

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Whenever we feel guilt and shame about something we have done or failed to do, we can pray and ask God to keep His promise to forgive us, and we can be confident He will do exactly that.

Whenever we become frustrated with what seems to be a lack of spiritual growth in the lives of people we care about, we can pray for them, reminding God of the promise He makes through the Apostle Paul:

Philippians 1:6 – And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

2nd – The prayers God promises to answer are those asking that His name would be glorified.

In 2 Samuel 7:23, David says the Lord rescued Israel “to make a great name for Himself.”

And then, David prays:

2 Samuel 7:25b-26a – “Do as you have promised, so that your name will be exalted forever.”

Friends, David certainly wants his house to be an eternal dynasty. He believes God will keep the promise He had made to the end. Yet, he also realizes that God’s ultimate goal is to bring glory to His own name. As history unfolds, it will be much more a testimony to God’s faithfulness than it is to David’s faith.

Some think it seems selfish and arrogant for God to desire and work for His own glory, but remember – He is God! He alone is worthy of that honor! It would be wrong for Him to want that glory to go anywhere but to Himself!

Here at CBC, we sometimes paraphrase Romans 8:28 this way:

“God will take all situations and circumstances and use them to bring about His glory and the ultimate good of His people.”

That is true, but our ultimate good, which won’t be completely revealed until heaven, will also be used to bring glory to God. That is our purpose in life – “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Or as John Piper says, “To glorify God by enjoying Him forever.”

So, this means we can be confident that God will answer our prayers for His glory. These are

prayers according to His will. These are prayers we should utter frequently:

- *Lord, may you be glorified as I am at work today.*
- *Lord, help me do my school work in a way that honors You.*
- *Lord, may my children and my grandchildren live in a way that glorifies You.*
- *May CBC be a church that always brings glory to Your name.*
- *May our theme continue to be “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name be glory.”*

Friends, I know if I had to sit down and pray for thirty minutes, it might still be a challenge. But, I also know that if my prayers include praise for specific aspects of God’s character and thanks for specific things He has done for us in Christ and pleas for Him to keep the magnificent promises He has made and requests that His name would be glorified, **those prayers will be ones which will be pleasing to the Lord and prayers He will be delighted to answer.**

May our prayers today be truly honoring to the Lord!