

“Prayer: Entering the Throne Room of God”

(1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Introduction

- This summer, for our “summer sermon series”, we have decided to preach on “Spiritual Disciplines.” As the term implies, a “spiritual discipline” is a means of training or chastening oneself to grow spiritually. It is important to remember that the pursuit of spiritual growth (spiritual discipline) is a command from God, and therefore not an option or elective for the Christian. Just as every Christian needs to grow and persevere in Christ, so too every Christian needs to practice spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual discipline: a biblical practice that helps Christians to mature and persevere in their walk with Jesus Christ.

“... *train yourself for godliness*” (1 Timothy 4:7).

- So far in this series, we have studied “spiritual disciplines” in general, and the specific disciplines of “worship”, “fasting”, and “confession.” This morning, we are going to biblically examine the spiritual discipline of “prayer.” I think many Christians would not think of prayer as a spiritual discipline (“it is just something you do when you need/want something from God”). But, as we will see, prayer is to be more than a “break glass in case of emergency” tool or used as a “last resort.”
- ✓ **Illust:** Samuel Chadwick wrote, “The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless study, prayerless work, prayerless religion ... but he trembles when we pray.”
- This is one reason why the Bible repeatedly commands believers to pray – and not just every once-in-awhile, but regular, fervent and persistent prayer. In Scripture, God commands us to ...
- 1 Thess 5:17** ~ “pray without ceasing [*adialeiptōs*; lit. unceasingly]”
- Eph 6:18** ~ “praying at all times [*en pas kairos*] in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints”
- Rom 12:12** ~ “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant [*proskartereō*; to be earnest, diligent, devoted] in prayer.”
- Acts 2:42** ~ “And they devoted [*proskartereō*] themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”
- Col 4:2** ~ “Continue steadfastly [*proskartereō*] in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
- Phil 4:6** ~ “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything [*en pas*] by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
- Obviously, to pray unceasingly does not mean that we quit our jobs, forsake our families, escape to some isolated or solitary place, and spend the rest of the hours of our days in prayer. Even Jesus did not do that. But it does mean that prayer is to be a part of the believer’s everyday life. Throughout the day a Christian is to be in constant communion with God. This is a sacred privilege. For prayer is the means by which we can be in fellowship with God our heavenly Father. Prayer is not simply something we do, it’s something we cannot do without!
- ✓ **Illust:** Famous nineteenth-century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon offers this vivid picture of what praying at all times means:
- “A Christian should carry the weapon of all-prayer like a drawn sword in his hand. We should never sheathe our supplications. Never may our hearts be like an unlimbered gun, with everything to be done to it before it can thunder on the foe, but it should be like a piece of cannon, loaded and

primed, only requiring the fire that it may be discharged. The soul should be not always in the exercise of prayer, but always in the energy of prayer; not always actually praying, but always intentionally praying.”

✓ **Illust:** “I think of prayer as living in continual God-consciousness, in which everything we see and experience becomes a kind of prayer, lived in deep awareness of and surrender to our heavenly Father. Whatever happens, there is a God-ward response ... Prayer is like breathing for Christians. When you don’t pray, you’re holding your breath spiritually – fighting against the very existence and presence of God in your life” (John MacArthur, *Lord, Teach me to Pray*, p.50).

✓ **Illust:** “As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray” (Martin Luther; from *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian life*, by Donald Whitney; p.82).

✓ **Illust:** “Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

➤ When we fail to pray, or reduce prayer to an obligatory religious chore, we fail to bring ourselves humbly before God’s throne in desperate dependence on His love, mercy, and guidance. True prayer is not an event in the Christian’s life, but a lifestyle for the Christian. Therefore, our prayers should not be confined to a specific time or place within our day, rather it should permeate through every single moment of our day (day or night, rain, or shine, at home or away, and in good times and bad). However, although Christians are to “pray continuously” by “living life in a God-conscious way” they are also instructed in God’s Word to find sacred “quiet” (private/secluded) times of personal prayer and devotion each and every day.

It has been said that if you want to bring conviction to a believer’s heart, preach on prayer (I know that preaching on prayer brings conviction to *my* heart). Prayer is one of those preciously insatiable characteristics of the Christian life – no one ever prays too much, and most Christians would readily admit that they do not pray enough. The Holy Spirit’s conviction is a good and necessary thing, but we should not bear unnecessary guilt and/or shame. None of us have mastered prayer, and all of us can grow in prayer.

➤ Of course, Jesus is the ultimate and perfect example of what it means to live the Christian life. And this is certainly true of Jesus with regard to prayer.

Luke 5:16 ~ “But [Jesus] would withdraw to desolate places and pray.”

Luke 5:16 ~ “Yet Jesus himself *frequently* withdrew to the wilderness and prayed.” (NET)

➤ Jesus Christ was a man of prayer. Throughout the Gospels we find Him in constant communion with God, and regularly in intimate and sacred communication with God. Jesus not only prayed early in the morning but also all throughout the day and night! He prayed in many different places, at many different times, and for many different reasons. Jesus’ faithful prayer life held Him in close and constant communion with God.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves, “If Jesus regularly spend time alone with God in prayer, how much more must we be engaged in private devotion and communication with God?” Perhaps the most common excuse given today as to why Christians are not more faithful in prayer is because they are too busy – there just seems to be too many things vying for our attention, and too many demands on our time. But do we really have more demands on our day than Jesus did? Are we really under more pressure than He was? Do we really have more people vying for our attention than He did? Of course not. As always, Jesus is our supreme and perfect model for the Christian life.

➤ To help us understand the spiritual discipline of prayer, and in hopes of encourages us to be more devoted to prayer, I want us to examine seven aspects of prayer (also, let me encourage you to look at the “Theology of Prayer” as an appendix to this message).

1. Prayer is simple

➤ It is important to understand that prayer is simple. Those with high IQ's do not have a special advantage when it comes to prayer. And God does not favor the prayers of those with religious degrees or large vocabularies. Simply put, prayer is talking to God. It is "the human heart/soul communicating with the Creator", "the Christian's earnest communion with their heavenly Father." There are no special formulas or sacred mantras that enable a person to have spiritual access to God. Our access to God comes through faith in Jesus Christ

1 Tim 2:5 ~ "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (see Rom.8:34; Heb.4:14-16; 7:24-25; 1Jn.2:1-2).

➤ Note the relative simplicity of some of the prayers in Scripture:

Matt 6:5-13 ~ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread, ¹²and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"

2 Kings 6:17 ~ "Then Elisha prayed and said, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.'"

Luke 18:13 ~ "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'"

Acts 1:24-25 ~ "And they prayed and said, 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.'" [i.e. Matthias; vs.26]

➤ Unfortunately, some people think prayer is so complicated, so confusing, so sophisticated, that they feel inadequate to pray. Consequently, they seldom pray or seldom pray without embarrassment or fear. We must not let the false notion that prayer is complicated or academic keep us from praying.

2. Prayer is difficult

➤ To say that prayer is simple is not meant to imply that it is easy. There is a reason why prayer is a spiritual discipline – it takes discipline (dedication, determination, and self-control) to be truly faithful in prayer.

Luke 18:1-8 ~ "And [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always [*pantote*] to pray and not lose heart [*mē egkakeo*]. ²He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' ⁶And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'"

- While it's relatively easy to pray selfish (narcissistic, self-centered) prayers, it is difficult to be a true faithful prayer warrior. Prayer is difficult because dying to self and denying oneself is difficult. True prayer requires that we humble ourselves before God, recognizing His supremacy and sovereignty and acknowledging our hopelessness and helplessness apart from God.

3. Prayer is sacred

- True prayer is an exercise of the human soul by the Spirit of God through the Son of God to the throne of God – by God the Spirit, through God the Son, to God the Father. This is a sacred, even supernatural, engagement. One that is in desperate need of God's mercy and grace. For apart from God's merciful permission and gracious provision, we could never approach His throne nor enter His throne room nor dare to be in His presence.

Heb 4:14-16 ~ “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let 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.”

Heb 10:19-22 ~ “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

- As a Christian, it is important to remember that when you pray you are praying to God – your Father in heaven – who ultimately rules, governs and controls all things! While we can come before God's throne with confidence (Heb.4:16), we must never come before His throne with arrogance or irreverence. The God who holds all the waters of the world in the palm of His hand knows, loves, and cares for you, but He still is the holy and righteous One.

✓ **Illust:** “True prayer is an approach of the soul by the Spirit of God to the throne of God. It is not the utterance of words, it is not alone the feeling of desires, but it is the advance of the desires to God, the spiritual approach of our nature towards the Lord our God. True prayer is not a mere mental exercise, nor a vocal performance, but it is deeper far than that – it is spiritual commerce with the Creator of heaven and earth. God is a Spirit unseen of mortal eye, and only to be perceived by the inner man; our spirit within us, begotten by the Holy Ghost at our regeneration, discerns the Great Spirit, communes with him, prefers to him its requests, and receives from him answers of peace. It is a spiritual business from beginning to end; and its aim and object end not with man, but reach to God himself” (Charles Spurgeon; sermon: “The Throne of Grace; November 19, 1871).

- We must not be flippant nor too casual about the sacred act of prayer. By God's grace (through our saving faith in Christ, and His substitutionary atonement for our sins) we can approach His throne with confidence (Heb.4:16), but we must never think that we can simply waltz into God's throne room irreverently or hypocritically or arrogantly. This is apparent in the beginning of “The Lord's Prayer”: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”* (Matt.6:9).

4. Prayer is a privilege

- Prayer is not a human invention. Prayer is not some humanly conceived way of breaking into God's throne room unannounced or uninvited. It is not some secret key to unlocking the mind of God, and it is not some magical way of manipulating the will of God. Saying whatever you want in prayer – while authoritatively saying “In Jesus' name” – does not coerce God into doing whatever we want.

Acts 19:11-20 ~ “And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’ ¹⁴Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ ¹⁶And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. ¹⁸Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”

John 14:13 ~ “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

1 John 5:14 ~ “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”

➤ God is never indebted to or obligated to us. The only thing that compels Him to hear and answer our prayers is His own divine nature and will. We can pray to God because God has enabled us to pray to Him.

Acts 17:24-25 ~ “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

Rom 11:33-36 ~ “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ³⁵‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ ³⁶‘For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.’”

➤ Prayer is truly an amazing and awesome privilege, given to us by God Himself! Through prayer, Christians pierce through haze of this sinful world and into the sacred throne room of God (see Heb.4:14-16). In prayer, believers truly have the ear of Almighty God – the one and only true and living God, Creator of the entire universe, and Savior of all who believe! Just thinking about this is a greater blessing than our minds can fully comprehend. The fact that God – who has perfect and infinite knowledge of all things, who holds all things in the palm of His hand and works all things according to His ultimate purpose and pleasure – not only hears our individual prayers but responds to each of our prayers personally and specifically is a mind-boggling and humbling truth. That is the amazing and awesome privilege of prayer.

Thankfully, God is never too busy to hear our prayers; He is never distracted, never capricious, never apathetic. And He is never powerless to answer our prayers. We are to pray to God about everything. Nothing is too big for Him to handle, and nothing is too small to escape His attention.

✓ Illust: G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) was the predecessor of Martin Lloyd Jones at Westminster Chapel (in London) and they served side by side for a number of years as well, and one Sunday morning, G. Campbell Morgan preached this extraordinary message on prayer, and a proper English woman came to him in the lobby after the service was over. She had on white gloves and took G. Campbell Morgan's hand with her white gloves and said, “Mr. Morgan, can I pray about little things or do I only pray about big things to God?” And G. Campbell Morgan looked at her and said, “Dear woman, everything in your life is little to God.”

5. Prayer is a command

➤ We must never disregard the commands of God. While prayer is a spiritual discipline, and a sacred privilege, we must understand that we are commanded to pray. Here are just a few explicit examples [“pray” (*proseuchomai*) as an imperative verb]:

Matt 5:44 ~ “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Matt 6:9 ~ “Pray then like this ...”

Luke 22:40 ~ “And when he came to the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation.’”

Col 4:2 ~ “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

1 Thess 5:17 ~ “pray without ceasing”

➤ It is important to note that prayer is not an elective, only to be utilized when a person wants to or feels the need to pray. Again, prayer is to be more than a “break glass in case of emergency” tool or used as a “last resort.” We are commanded to pray, and as Christians we are to be obedient to the commands of God.

6. Prayer is learned

➤ In many ways, prayer is the innate response from the Christian (or the repentant sinner) to his/her God. But prayer is also a learned discipline. The way a Christian grows in prayer is by praying and studying prayer.

Luke 11:1 ~ “Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’”

➤ There are many ways in which a Christian can learn how to pray, and to grow in prayer. Here are a few suggestions:

a) *by praying* ~

Unfortunately, many Christians do not pray (or pray very often) because they feel they do not know how to pray (obviously, if they never learn how to pray this is a merry-go-round that never stops!). One of the best ways to learn how to pray is by praying. Like learning a foreign language or learning to play an instrument, one must practice praying in order to learn how to pray.

b) *by praying (meditating on) Scripture* ~

Perhaps the best pragmatic advice one can give another concerning how to pray is to pray the Scriptures. As the phrase suggests, praying the Scriptures refers to the practice of using Scripture as the basis of your prayer. This helps our prayers to be guided by and saturated in God’s Word.

We tend to pray the same things – or offer the same general requests – over and over again. Consequently, our prayer lives become repetitious, monotonous, and tedious. Our minds can tend to wander, and our hearts can grow cold. As such, the very thought of prayer – much less praying more – can be daunting. The problem is not so much that we pray about the same things, but that we pray about the same things the same way.

Praying Scripture is not merely reading Scripture during your prayer time (although you may want to read it through before you pray) but reading Scripture as your heartfelt prayer to God. This can be done by pausing after every phrase, or verse, and personalizing the expression for your own life. Perhaps the best (easiest) Scriptures to pray are the Psalms, and then selected prayers in the New Testament (see “Praying the Bible” by Donald S. Whitney).

You can also pray any part of Scripture, using the content of God’s Word to communicate with God. Praying Scripture enables us to pray the same things in new ways, and may even lead us to

pray in new and deeper ways. And it follows the example set by Jesus (Matt.27:46, Lk.23:46) and the early church (Acts 4:23-26).

Here are just a relative few number of passages of Scriptures that can be used to easily shape and guide our prayers according to God's will: 1Chron.16:8-36; Ps.5, 8, 51, 86, 92, 139, 145; Jon.2; Matt. 6:5-14; Eph.1:15-23, 3:14-21; Phil.1:9-11; 2Thess.1:3-12.

c) *by reading good books (or sermons) on prayer ~*

There is no shortage of books on prayer – this is both a blessing and a problem. It is a problem because there are many unbiblical, even heretical, books on prayer available to us today. It takes discernment for us to weed through all the bad books on prayer in order to find the good books on prayer.

“Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers” (ed. Arthur Bennett), “Spurgeon Prayers” (<https://www.spurgeongems.org/spurgeon-prayers>), “Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans” (Robert Elmer), “At the Throne of Grace: A book of prayer” (John MacArthur); “A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting world” (Paul E. Miller), “The Prayer of the Lord” (RC Sproul), “Hymns of Grace” (Master’s Seminary Press), “Praying Backwards” (Bryan Chapell), “With Christ in the School of Prayer” (Andrew Murray), “Praying the Bible” (Donald Whitney), “Praying with Paul: A call to spiritual reformation” (D.A. Carson).

d) *by praying with others ~*

The disciples not only heard Jesus teach on prayer, but they also had a front-row seat to Jesus’ prayers. No doubt they noticed a great difference in the way Jesus prayed, from their own prayers (which is probably one reason why they asked Him to teach them how to pray; Lk.11:1). Hearing other Christians pray, especially those who are more mature and wise, can model for us godly prayers.

But with this comes a much-needed warning: we must not learn to merely parrot other people’s prayers – heartlessly gathering up biblical/spiritual phrases in order to make our prayers sound more godly (see Matt.6:5, 7). Our goal is never to impress others with our prayers, but others can help us pray more broadly, selflessly, and faithfully.

➤ Another helpful way in which we can learn how to pray, and grow in prayer, is to follow a biblical model of patter of prayer (e.g. the Lord’s prayer, Matt.6:9-13; Lk.11:2-4). Personally, I have found the acronym ACTS, which highlights four elements of prayer:

Adoration – This answers the question: “Who is God?” The ‘A’ in the ACTS model stands for adoration, which means worship – glorifying and exalting God. Through adoration, we show our loyalty and admiration of our Father. As we pray, we are called to worship God in adoration. This could be a song of praise to Him, praying a psalm of worship, declaring His attributes, or a myriad of other forms of worship.

Confession – This answers the question: “Who Am I?” The ‘C’ in the ACTS model stands for confession. The word confess means “to agree with.” When we confess our sins, we agree with God that we are wrong and that we have sinned against Him by what we have said, thought, or done. God forgives us and restores our fellowship with Him (1Jn.1:9).

Thanksgiving – This answers the question: “What has God done?” The ‘T’ represents thanksgiving. Philippians 4:6 says, “With thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” How is thanksgiving different from adoration? The difference is that worship focuses on who God is; thanksgiving focuses on what God has done. We can thank God for many things including His love, salvation, protection, and provision.

Supplication – This answers the question: “What would I ask God to do?” The ‘S’ stands for supplication, which refers to prayer for our and others’ needs. A supplication is a request or petition.

We may pray for mercy (Ps.4:1), leading (Ps.5:8), wisdom (Jms.1:5), and much more. Paul encouraged us to make “supplication for all the saints” (Eph.6:18), which means to pray diligently for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

- A word of caution: models and forms of prayer can lead us into heartless and/or mindless prayers. We must remember that the goal is not to pray profoundly super-spiritual prayers, but to earnestly communicate with our Sovereign God.

7. Prayer can be hindered

- Many people are surprised to hear that God is not obligated to hear or answer their prayers. Some presume God to be a Genie in lamp – if you rub the lamp the Genie must come out and grant you whatever you wish. But God is no Genie, and He is not obliged to fulfill the demands and whims of His creation.

a) Unrepentant sin

Ps 66:18 ~ “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

Isa 59:2 ~ “but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”

b) Pride / Self-righteousness

Luke 18:9-14 ~ “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.’”

c) Selfishness / Wrong motives

James 4:3 ~ “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

d) Hypocrisy / Duplicity

Matt 6:5-8 ~ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Isa 1:15 ~ “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”

e) Unforgiveness

Matt 6:12-15 ~ “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ... ¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Mark 11:25 ~ “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Matt 18:35 ~ “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” (see “Parable of the unforgiving servant”; Matt.18:21-35)

Col 3:13 ~ “bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

f) Disobedience

Prov 15:8-9 ~ “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him. ⁹The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves him who pursues righteousness.”

Prov 21:13 ~ “Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.”

Prov 28:9 ~ “If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”

1 John 3:22 ~ “and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.”

1 Peter 3:7 ~ “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

g) Doubt / Unbelief

James 1:6-7 ~ “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord”

Matt 21:22 ~ “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

h) Requests that are contrary to God’s will

1 John 5:14 ~ “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”

John 14:13 ~ “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

James 4:15 ~ “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”

Conclusion

➤ The immediate goal of prayer is “ear of God”, but the ultimate goal of prayer is the glory of God. As with all spiritual disciplines, the spiritual discipline of prayer is to help Christians mature and persevere in their walk with Jesus Christ.

Phil 4:6-7 ~ “Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (NET)

Eph 6:18 ~ “With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and requests for all the saints.” (NET)

O Lord,

In prayer I launch far out into the eternal world, and on that broad ocean my soul triumphs over all evils on the shores of mortality. Time, with its gay amusements and cruel disappointments, never appears so inconsiderate as then.

In prayer I see myself as nothing; I find my heart going after Thee with intensity, and long with vehement thirst to live to Thee. Blessed be the strong gales of the Spirit that speed me on my way to the New Jerusalem.

In prayer all things here below vanish, and nothing seems important but holiness of heart and the salvation of others.

In prayer all my worldly cares, fears, anxieties disappear, and are of as little significance as a puff of wind.

In prayer my soul inwardly exults with lively thoughts at what Thou art doing for Thy church, and I long that Thou shouldst get Thyself a great name from sinners returning to Zion.

In prayer I am lifted above the frowns and flatteries of life, and taste heavenly joys; entering into the eternal world I can give myself to Thee with all my heart, to be Thine forever.

In prayer I can place all my concerns in Thy hands, to be entirely at Thy disposal, having no will or interest of my own.

In prayer I can intercede for my friends, ministers, sinners, the church, thy kingdom to come, with greatest freedom, ardent hopes, as a son to his father, as a lover to the beloved.

Help me to be all prayer and never to cease praying.

The Valley of Vision: A collection of Puritan Prayers ("In Prayer") edited by Arthur Bennett

The Theology of Prayer

(What prayer is, and what prayer is not)

1. Prayer is not the spiritual right or ability to manipulate the will of God for our own purposes or desires.
2. Prayer is not informing God of things that He does not already know, or in any way helping to form God's eternal perspective and pleasure.
3. Prayer is not some insignificant or ineffective activity that has no bearing on the lives of the people in this world.
4. Prayer is a God-ordained means of drawing us into a closer relationship and more intimate fellowship with Him.
5. Prayer is a God-appointed means of enabling us to participate in the work that He has ordained.
6. Prayer is a God-intended means of shaping our minds and wills to be in harmony with His sovereign mind and will.
7. Prayer is a God-honoring means of drawing us to minister to others with His love, truth and grace.
8. Prayer is a God-glorifying means of strengthening our faith and sanctifying our lives as we faithfully seek Him and His will.

[This sermon was preached at Skyline Baptist Church by Pastor David Woodruff on August 15, 2021]