

I have the opportunity to fill in for Jim this morning. He is feeling better and recovering from the flu and I know he appreciates all of your prayers.

This morning's Bible Study is going to be a little different. We are going to take an in depth look at prayer. Before we launch in on our study though, I want to start where Scott left off last week talking about the heart.

Scott did a great job explain the importance of the heart and how our hearts are truly what God desires for us. **It is important to start talking about the heart when we discuss any aspect of the Christian life because if the heart is not engaged then we are wasting our time.**

The Pharisees were the ones who had all of the actions and their hearts were far from God. Listen to how harsh Jesus is of what they are doing.

Matthew 23:25-28

(25) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.**

(26) You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

(27) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which **outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.**

(28) **So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

To me the scariest thing in this passage is the condemnation in verse 28. From the outside they appear righteous they are not gross sinners. In fact they are adamant on upholding the law. Yet Christ cuts right to the main issue. **But within ... in your heart... you are not focused on a true relationship with God.**

This is a telling example for us. Not to pursue the typical Christian actions or to fit the typical mold, but to earnestly seek after God with our hearts.

If we were all honest there are times in our Christian walk when our hearts are not engaged. **We have become the Pharisee. Pursuing the action and not the heart behind it.**

One issue I see happening in the church today though is I think we have let modern ideas influence our definition of what the heart is. We usually talk about our hearts as being the place of all of our emotions. "I felt it in my heart."

We hear that our heart must be engaged and I fear that we just heard that we have to feel a certain way or have a certain set of emotions.

We need to understand what scripture means by the heart. In our American modern mindset the **heart has become the place of all emotions** and feeling and then there is **the rational mind, where we think** and then the will where we decide things ... and we could keep going into all the different ways we try to describe what makes us tick.

As I started to study this concept I wanted the Biblical idea of the heart to really be our modern concept of the mind purely rational and about thoughts, truth etc. This fits my personality though. But what I think is fascinating is that when you see how many thousands of times the heart is mentioned in scripture it really encapsulates so many different facets in us.

The heart is not just the mind or rational thought

The heart is not just emotions

The heart is referred to in scripture close to 1000 times.
As to its usage in the NT it denotes:

the seat of physical life, Acts 14:17; Jas. 5:5;
the seat of grief, John 14:1; Rom. 9:2; 2 Cor. 2:4;
joy, John 16:22; Eph. 5:19;
the desires(sinful), Matt. 5:28; 2 Pet. 2:14;
the affections, Luke 24:32; Acts 21:13;
the perceptions, John 12:40; Eph. 4:18;
the thoughts, Matt. 9:4; Heb. 4:12;
the understanding, Matt. 13:15; Rom. 1:21;
the reasoning powers, Mark 2:6; Luke 24:38;
the imagination, Luke 1:51;
conscience, Acts 2:37; 1 John 3:20;
the intentions, Heb. 4:12,
purpose, Acts 11:23; 2 Cor. 9:7;
the will, Rom. 6:17; Col. 3:15;
faith/ belief, Mark 11:23; Rom. 10:10; Heb. 3:12.

The Heart fully encompasses who we are: the best summary is that it involves three main parts of who we are.

-Our Mind

Scripture refers to the heart thinking

Proverbs 23:7 KJV

(7) **For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he:** Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart *is* not with thee.

-Our Actions (Will/ Voliation)

2 Corinthians 9:7

(7) Each one must give **as he has decided in his heart**, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Acts 5:4

(4) While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? **Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?** You have not lied to man but to God."

-Our Emotions

Psalms 4:7

(7) You have put more **joy in my heart** than they have when their grain and wine abound.

First we know the truth in our Mind (Heart) We stop and think and know I need to connect with God and His truth if I want to have a close walk with Him. Then these thoughts should lead to our actions, Because I know this to be true I am going to act on it and read, pray, think about truth.

I hope you get the idea that for our heart to be engaged our minds (or what we consider or minds) must be engaged. Then after we have thought and acted the emotions come last. They are last and least.

Here is the fantastic part, God wants to lead us through all of this! Our hearts are so complicated we can't know everything that is going on in it. We barely scratch the surface but notice the promises we have.

God knows our hearts better than we can and has given us the Word.

Hebrews 4:12-13

(12) For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**

(13) And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

So this leads us to our main topic this morning, prayer. **Not only has God given us the Word to reveal our hearts He has also given us the ability to communicate directly with Him.** If this concept of the heart doesn't make sense we actually have the ability to ask questions of the

one who designed it in the first place.

As we start looking into prayer I want to start with a promise we have been given by God.

Psalms 65:1-2

(1) **To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. A Song.** Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed.

(2) **O you who hear prayer**, to you shall all flesh come.

God hears our prayers. I know the first reaction is well yeah, of course. But let's stop and think on that just for a moment.

The God who:

- Created everything we know just by speaking
 - Has no beginning is actually outside of time
 - Who dwells in unapproachable light
 - Who is so holy and perfect that if we were to see Him we would die
 - The God who holds the entire universe together constantly by his word
- OThe God who daily:

Job 38:12

(12) "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place,

That God hears our prayers.

We have a direct line of communication to that God and we think the truth that God hears our prayer is boring, simple or basic. This fact should revolutionize our prayer life.

Scripture even goes a step farther and shows us where our prayers go:

Revelation 5:1-8 NP

Revelation 5:1-8

(1) Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

(2) And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll

and break its seals?"

(3) And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,

(4) and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

(5) And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

(6) And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders **I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain**, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

(7) And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

(8) And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, **and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**.

Christ is being revealed in heaven as the one who has the right to start the tribulation and reconcile all things and then there is a little detail in verse 8. Our prayers are being collected in a golden bowl in God's very presence.

We are not praying to an angel or guardian angel we are praying straight to God and He cares about our prayers so much He is storing them up. We are told to have a confidence in this.

Hebrews 10:19-23

(19) Therefore, brothers, **since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus**,

(20) by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

(21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

(22) **let 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.

(23) Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, **for he who promised is faithful**.

We can have a confidence in approaching God's presence, in our prayers because of Christ.

When we start to see how real prayer is, and who we have direct access to hopefully it will develop a desire to pray more.

Scripture is clear on how often we are to pray:

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18

(17) **pray without ceasing**,

(18) give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Think about this for a second again scriptures command on prayer is all encompassing. Have a heart of prayer. And yet if our hearts are not engaged think about how we have

cheeped prayer. We have reduced a prayerful mind down to quick prayer before meals and then maybe before bed.

Jesus also gave us very specific instructions on what our prayers were supposed to be like.

Matthew 6:5-13

(5) "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.

(6) But 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.

Prayer is not focused on being seen by others it is focused on being heard by God

(7) "And 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**.

(8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Do not use empty words phrases or repetition when you pray. God wants us to be real with him and talk not empty repetition God bless... God bless... be with... (Is our mind even engaged?) **(Praying at night, God thank you for this food)**

(9) Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Worship God

(10) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Pray for Gods eternal will to be accomplished

(11) Give us this day our daily bread,
Praying for our needs

(12) and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
Confession

(13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
Asking God to lead us and keep us from sin (guide my heart)

And yet even after great instruction like this we still can struggle to know what to pray. What is awesome is scripture has a great promise about that:

Romans 8:26-27

(26) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. **For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.**

(27) And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, **because the Spirit**

intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

When we don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit is behind us praying on our behalf. **How amazing is that and the Spirit is praying God's will for us.** And the great news is it is according to God's will.

So don't get discouraged if you don't know what to pray for. The Spirit is praying with you and in fact you can ask God to show you what to pray for:

God I don't know how to even pray about this situation please give me your wisdom and show me how to pray. Again this really goes to letting God guide us. Especially in our prayers it is inviting Him to lead.

I think at times we don't pray because we don't know what to pray for and then at other times we don't pray because there is still some doubt in the back of our mind if it really works.

James 5:13-15

(13) Is anyone among you suffering? **Let him pray.** Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

(14) Is anyone among you sick? **Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.**

(15) And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

How many of you have heard the Christianese saying. When all else fail pray. I hate that saying. NO! In every situation our first instinct should be to pray.

This has to be a learned habit. Notice the commands in these verses. How prayer should be our first reaction

James 5:13-14

(13) Is anyone among you suffering? **Let him pray.**

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

(14) Is anyone among you sick? **Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.**

This doesn't negate going to doctors but our first inclination should be to go to God and pray first. Do not miss the command in verse 14. This is not something that is dated and not practiced any more. Our elders take a real joy in fulfilling the command in this verse.

Why do we have to gather together, why not just pray individually? There is tremendous support in joining with Godly believers who love you and are earnestly seeking God's will in your life.

Then James encourages us in how powerful prayer is.

James 5:16-18

(16) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

(17) **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.**

(18) **Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.**

There was nothing unique about Elijah but He was praying God's will.

We have to reprogram our minds, through practice, to go to prayer first and trust that it is powerful and a real answer to things.

Story about summer camp: Prayer is real and yet we doubt it when something happens.

I think another reason we don't pray is that we struggle with being persistent, meaning we struggle to trust God enough to wait on prayer.

Luke 18:1-8 NP

Luke 18:1-8

(1) **And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.**

Right here we are given the purpose of the parable, there should be no doubt in what Christ was trying to teach, be persistent in prayer.

(2) He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.

(3) **And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'**

- (4) For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, **'Though I neither fear God nor respect man,**
- (5) **yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'**"
- (6) And the Lord said, **"Hear what the unrighteous judge says.**

Even the unrighteous judge can be worn down by persistence. This is constant nagging. Verse 5 literally says to stop the Widow from assaulting me.

- (7) **And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?**
- (8) **I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

Jesus point is pretty simple. If we can wear down a sinful man with pestering, someone that doesn't care for us; why do we think that God would not be quick to hear us? **Notice the contrast in the parable the unrighteous judge has to be worn down. God does not;** He is a good father who lavishly loves us. We do not have to wear him down in prayer.

And yet, remember the point at the beginning to be persistent in prayer. So that begs the question why?

Praying helps us focus on God as our confidence and it realigns us to His will.

1 John 5:13-15

- (13) I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.
- (14) **And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.**
- (15) **And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.**

Notice we should have a confidence in God hearing our prayers and we should have a confidence that he answers our prayers. Notice the condition though. **We must pray according to his will.**

Prayer reorients our attitude to God. Often I think we mistake not getting an answer for not getting the answer we wanted.

Prayer should realign us to God and give us the attitude I want what God wants in Gods timing. This is why we are to be persistent in it, not pleading over and over but a continued confidence that God's will and His eternal plan are best.

We see Paul have this attitude.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

(7) **So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh,** a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

(8) **Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this,** that it should leave me.

(9) But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

(10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul prays three times, for the ailment to be removed but God reveals that this earthly physical pain is accomplishing something eternal and gives Paul a new outlook of how to view it. Praying changed Paul's perspective and helped Him view things through God's eternal perspective.

The best way to be sure you are praying according to God's will. Use truth, use the Word. We should take the promises given to us by God and turn them into prayers because then we are guaranteed He will answer them.

An example of this is:

Psalms 34:17-19

(17) When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

(18) **The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.**

(19) Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

When you are going through a trial, and maybe feel lonely and abandon think about how amazing this verse is to be used as a prayer to God.

God you have promised me that you are near to the broken hearted. I don't **FEEL** you right now but Your word says you are near me, I ask that you would help me to **KNOW** that you are right hear with me, and that you will deliver me according to your perfect plan. And Father I thank you in advance for being here with me.

Based on 1 John if we are praying God's will, and using scripture guarantees that, we can be so bold to thank God for His answer before we get it that is how assured we are of the answer.

This is why being in the Word and prayer should be so interconnected. Our prayer should be based on the truth in God's

Word that we have meditated (thought about, let sink in) and then pray them back to God. When you run out of things to pray, pray scripture.

Another thing that distracts from our prayer is all of the distractions that are all around us.

Prayer involves focused thinking, and with technology we have done a really good job of surrounding ourselves with noise. To pray we need to be able to mentally focus. In college I was convicted by this and decided not to turn my radio on in the car. It helped me have 5 minutes throughout my day to connect in with God before my next thing started.

One thing I find interesting in scripture is that even **Christ had to be intentional to find time to pray and remove distractions.** His distraction was a multitude of people clamoring for Him, not His cell phone.

Luke 5:15-16

(15) But now even more the report about him went abroad, and **great crowds gathered** to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

(16) **But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.**

Matthew 14:23

(23) And after he had dismissed **the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,**

Mark 1:35

(35) And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, **he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.**

Luke 6:12-13

(12) In these days **he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.**

(13) And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:

This was a regular pattern for Jesus, Silence and solitude. I also love this last one that next day He was about to appoint the apostles so He pulls an all-nighter to pray. I have been challenged by the thought when life gets really busy. **I am too busy not to stop and pray right now.**

I also want to take some time and talk about some fears I have had and I know others do to about the mechanics of prayer.

Is it wrong to fall asleep while I am praying?

Is it disrespectful to let my mind wander while I am praying?

Psalms 103:13-14

(13) As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

(14) **For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.**

Colossians 4:2

(2) Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Ephesians 6:18-20

(18) praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Colossians 4:12

(12) Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, **always struggling on your behalf in his prayers**, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

James 1:5-8

(5) **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.**

(6) **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.

(7) For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

(8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.