

Having finished two weeks ago, our Savior's prayer in John 17, it's my intention this morning, to begin a short topical study on the broad and important theme of Christian Prayer. Prayer is essential to the Christian life. It is to the soul what breathing is to the body.

And yet, most Christians struggle with a consistent and healthy prayer life. Some of us, perhaps many of us, would be embarrassed to admit, how little or poorly we pray. And thus, Christians need help to know how and why they should pray. But perhaps more than this, we simply need encourage to pray. We need constant motivation to pray.

Now, it's rather easy to make Christians feel guilty about their prayer life. This is not my primary goal (though it's possible that we may need to be corrected and challenged)—but my primary goal is to assist you and help you to pray more consistently, Biblically, and effectively.

What exactly is prayer? What are its hindrances? Its benefits or purposes? How does prayer relate to God's sovereignty? These are some of the questions that I want to answer in the next several sermons, as we consider together the subject of Christian Prayer. This brings us to our first study this morning entitled – Prayer: Its Definition (what is prayer).

Ephesians 6:10-20 is a classic passage on spiritual warfare—it provides 6 pieces of armor for the Christian soldier. Afterwards, Paul adds this statement on prayer, v18—"praying always with all prayer and supplication." The point being, prayer is essential to a right application of these things. Each piece is put on by prayer.

I. Prayer Defined

II. Prayer Applied

I. Prayer Defined

1. There are different ways to define prayer—we could define it simply as speaking to God, or talking to God...
2. But instead I want to give a rather extended definition largely taken from John Bunyan's treatise, *On Praying In the Spirit*.
3. Prayer is—a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised in His word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God.
4. Here I want to move through this definition, not word by word, but thought by thought, suggesting five parts.
5. [1] Prayer is pouring out the heart to God—this I trust goes without saying—prayer is sincere, sensible, and affectionate.
6. Gardner Springs—"Prayer is the language of desire; it is the offering up of our desires to God. It is the devotional thoughts and affections of the soul expressed in words."
7. Now, this of course does NOT mean that prayer is as sincere, sensible, and affectionate as it should be, but true prayer is from the heart.
8. Prayer is the outpouring of the heart to God—it's making our needs and desires known to our heavenly Father.
9. Ps.62:8—"Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us" Ps.39:12—"Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears..."
10. At the very heart of prayer is the expression of need—prayer is an expression of our helplessness and need...
11. But, prayer is also an expression of weakness and helplessness directed toward God as our Heavenly Father.
12. Prayer is "pouring out our heart to God"—it's "crying out to God"—it's making our needs and desires known to God...

13. [2] Prayer is through Christ—this obviously is a very important part of prayer—true prayer is in the name of Christ...
14. Jn.14:14—"If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"—that is, if you ask anything for My sake or merit...
15. Through prayer, saints enter into the very presence of God Himself—prayer brings us before God's throne...
16. Oh dear brethren, why is this throne a throne of grace, but because of Christ, it's only because Christ went before...
17. Heb.4:14-16—"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need..."
18. Christians are exhorted to come boldly before the throne of grace, because Christ has passed through the heavens...
19. And thus, we come to God through Christ, we come to God at His back, we come to God in Christ's name...
20. By "throne of grace" there is little doubt the apostle was thinking back to the OC Temple and the Mercyseat.
21. If you remember, once a year the High Priest entered beyond the veil, into the Most Holy Place, and the Mercyseat.
22. The Mercyseat was a gold slab built upon the Ark of the Covenant, with two winged Cherubim connected together.
23. This gave the appearance of a throne, the place where God ruled and reigned over His beloved covenant people...
24. Ps.99:1—"The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells *between* the cherubim; let the earth be moved."
25. Now, with this in mind, these words of Paul, in Hebrews 4:16, become all the more amazing—"Let us come boldly to the throne of grace."
26. In short—let us boldly enter beyond the veil into the very special presence of God—let us stand before His throne...
27. Now, I know we know this, but I think it's necessary to be stated—in prayer Christians enter the special presence of God...
28. While God is everywhere present, there are three places where He is uniquely present—in our hearts, in the church, and in heaven...
29. And it's through prayer that believers enter the very throne room of heaven—we have access to God's special, gracious, and loving presence...
30. But this access is only in and through Christ—it's only because Christ, our High Priest, enter before us with His own blood...
31. [3] Prayer is in the Spirit, Eph.6:18—"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit"—to pray "in the Spirit" means to "pray by the Spirit" or "with the help of the Spirit."
32. Baptist Catechism (Q.105)—"Prayer is an offering up our desires to God, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ."
33. Rom.8:26—"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered..."
34. The Holy Spirit is essential to every aspect of prayer—He creates in us the desire to pray, a sense of our need, faith in God's promises, knowledge of God's love for us, and shows us the perfect merits of Jesus Christ.
35. While Christ intercedes for us in heaven, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us on earth, and these two intercessions are similar...
36. Christ pleads the merits of His atoning love, while the Spirit pleads the reality of this atoning love in our hearts...
37. Perhaps I can put it this way—Christ shows the Father Himself, and thus, the Holy Spirit also shows us Christ...

38. He works within our hearts to convince us of our need, and then He shows us God's love, for the sake of Christ...
39. Rom.8:15-16—"You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears with our spirit that we are children of God..."
40. The Spirit gives us a knowledge and sense of our adoption—He testifies with our spirit that we are God's child...
41. Thus, we learn that prayer is Trinitarian—that is, we pray to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit...
42. Eph.2:18—"For through Him (Christ) we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit, to the Father..."
43. This of course doesn't mean we should never prayer to the Son or Spirit, but ordinarily, prayer is to the Father, through Christ, by the Spirit.
44. [4] Prayer is for things promised in God's word—all true prayer is for things God has promised within His word...
45. 1Jn.5:14—"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will (revealed will as found in Scripture), He hears us."
46. True prayer comes before God with a promise—prayer is asking God for the things He has promised in His word...
47. Thus, throughout the Psalms, David prays for guidance, protection, and strength—"according to Your word"—that is, according to the word of Your promise...
48. Now, this does not mean that prayer needs a specific promise—for example, in praying for my neighbor's salvation...
49. Nowhere in the Bible do I have specific promise that my neighbor will be saved—his name is not in Scripture...
50. But I do have broad or generic promises, that God loves sinners, and that God desires that sinners be saved...
51. And thus, we must always come to God with His word in our mouth—O Father, you have promised in Your word...
52. You have revealed in Your word what would please You and glory You—that You desire this is found in Scripture...
53. Dan.9:2-3—"in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the LORD God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes."
54. [5] Prayer is with submission and trust to God's will—true prayer is always offered in submission to God's sovereign will...
55. Let me briefly remind you of the distinction between God's secrete (sovereign) will and His revealed will (Scripture)...
56. God's secrete (or sovereign) will is unknown to us, includes every event, and will of necessity come to pass...
57. God's revealed will is made known to us in the Scriptures, and thus forms the basis for living and for praying...
58. Thus, while we must form our prayers according to the revealed will of God in Scripture, we must submit our prayers to God's sovereign will in heaven...
59. This is what our Savior meant when He prayed—"Father, not My will, but Your will be done"—that is, Your sovereign will...
60. Thus, all true prayer is always in submission to God's sovereign purposes and will—prayer does NOT change God or His sovereign will...
61. God does and can not change—thus, prayer is not an attempt to change God, but it's verbal submission to God...
62. Prayer is pouring out before God all of our needs and desires, and trusting Him to answer them as He seems best.
63. Prayer is humble and believing submission to God and His gracious, loving, and all-wise sovereign purposes.

II. Prayer Applied

1. Here, somewhat briefly, I want to suggest five applications that result from this extended definition of prayer.
2. [1] Let us adore God for the privilege of prayer—the nature of this privilege can hardly be overstated or exaggerated...
3. Our Father invites and/or commands us, to enter His courts with praise, adoration, supplication, and thanksgiving...
4. Our Father never grows weary or tired of our voice, regardless how many times we ask for the same things...
5. Regardless how many times we plead for more grace, regardless how many times we ask Him for forgiveness.
6. My dear friends, our Father loves to hear the voice of His beloved children, and He delights to answer prayer.
7. Song 2:14—"O My dove...Let Me see your face, let Me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."
8. Oh dear brethren, how do I even begin to explain the love that Christ has for His needy and beloved people (or the love the Father has for His children).
9. Let me illustrate it this way—think of a first time father, as he looks down upon his little child with a heart full of love.
10. Doesn't the father delight in spending time with his child—doesn't he think of the child through the entire day.
11. Well dear brethren, if this is true of us who are sinful, how much more does God delight in the presence of His children.
12. What a privilege we have of not only entering the chamber of our Father, but also the very throne room of God.
13. God, the maker of heaven and earth, welcomes us, redeemed sinners, to enter His throne room, and in some sense, climb up into His very bosom.
14. Thus, as we shall see in upcoming studies, our attitude in prayer is to be both one of reverence and affection (we come to our Heavenly Father).
15. We come to our Heavenly Father who loves to hear prayer, who loves to hear the voice of His beloved people.
16. Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon from Ps.65:2 (You who hear prayer), entitled—The Most High: A Prayer-Hearing God.
17. What a wonderful way to describe God—The Most High: A Prayer-Hearing God—a God who hears prayer.
18. [2] Let us lament the fact that we neglect prayer—brethren, it's nothing less than folly, how Christians neglect prayer.
19. We have promised to us all of the riches of Christ—all the grace necessary to fight our enemies and obey God.
20. Our Father delights in His children finding refuge in Him, and fellowshiping with Him through loving prayer.
21. And yet, most of us often neglect prayer, at our own loss—we endure so much trouble and worry that we otherwise would not.
22. Hymn—"What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."
23. My friends, I do not intend to be unkind or rude, but a lack of prayer argues we lack a knowledge of our need.
24. Many of us need to lament the fact that we often live beneath our privileges, by neglecting or ignoring prayer.
25. [3] Let us learn to be more effective in prayer—there are right and wrong ways to pray—not all that claims to be prayer is prayer...

26. I think all of us, regardless how long we have been Christians, need to learn more clearly what true prayer is.
27. Lk.11:1—"Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."
28. The disciples confessed their need of being taught how to pray, just as John's disciples needed to be taught to pray.
29. All Christians need to learn how to pray more effectively, and this is true regardless how long you've been Christian.
30. Let me encourage you to take Bunyan's definition, memorize it, and be sure you are clear as to what it means.
31. One way to be more effective in prayer is to understand what prayer is, why it's important, and why it's hindered.
32. [4] Let us beware of our enemies while in prayer—by enemies I mean Satan and our flesh who team up to keep us from prayer or to distract us in prayer.
33. Eph.6:18—"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."
34. Remember, Paul's exhortation about prayer follows his treatment of spiritual warfare and the Christian's armor.
35. Christians are soldiers in the middle of a war—we have powerful enemies who seek to hinder our spiritual activities.
36. Satan knows how important prayer is—he knows the many benefits that come to Christians through or by prayer.
37. Our flesh recoils against prayer because it's a truly spiritual exercise—our flesh fights against prayer more than all other duties.
38. Each time we bow our heads in prayer, there is a sense in which we must face our enemies in hand to hand combat.
39. [5] Let us remember the basic essence of prayer—that is, at it's very core, prayer is the cry of the heart to God.
40. What makes a prayer effective and honoring to God isn't elegance and flawless pronunciation, but heartfelt sincerity.
41. Matt.15:8—"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me."
42. I don't want to give you the wrong impression in this first and introductory sermon—prayer is a heartfelt cry to God.
43. True prayer only takes place when the heart and mouth are in unison—when the mouth speaks from the heart.
44. This is prayer—prayer is the verbal expression of heart desires—it's the cry and groans of a needy and believing soul.
45. Now, let me close by making this final clarification—it's true Scripture says God only hears the prayers of His people.
46. But this does not mean, that God in no way hears the prayers of sinners, because Scripture says that He does.
47. In Luke chapter 18, our Savior told a parable about two men who went up to the temple to pray—a Pharisee and tax collector.
48. The Pharisee was a religious hypocrite while the tax collector was a notorious sinner—despised by the Jews.
49. The Pharisee prayed his self-righteous prayer—"God, I think You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."
50. Lk.18:13-14—"And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."