

Prayer for Missions: Psalm 67
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church
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This morning will conclude this short series on prayer that we've been in the last few weeks. Next Sunday is going to be a membership Sunday, and we're excited to affirm several new members. And I'll also make that the topic of the sermon for next Sunday. We'll consider together the whole idea of church membership: what it is, what the Bible says about it, why it's important, etc.

But this morning let's talk again about prayer, and specifically about prayer for missions. In a moment I'll read Psalm 67, but first let's remember what we've learned from the passages we've studied the last 3 weeks.

Review from previous weeks

We first looked at the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, and we saw that Jesus instructs us to pray in an utterly God-centered way. We pray to our Heavenly Father, and we ask Him to glorify His Name! We ask Him to manifest His power and advance His Kingdom. We ask Him to conform everything to His revealed will. We say, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." These are requests concerning God's glory. They are God-centered petitions that we make to God. And as we pray like this, it changes us. As we pray in the way Jesus taught us to pray, our desires will be aligned more and more with God's desires. His passions will become our passions. And His greatest passion is making His Name known. So this is the main focus and the chief purpose of our prayers.

The Lord's prayer also includes requests concerning our needs. We ask our Heavenly Father, "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We ask God to provide for our daily needs. We ask Him to forgive our sins. And we ask Him to help us in the fight of faith. All of these requests show very vividly that we are entirely dependent on Him. Praying like this is a humbling activity. We must acknowledge our need and recognize that God is the One able to meet our needs. We are dependent. He is all-sufficient. And so prayer is a way for us to receive blessing and for God to receive glory.

In Ephesians 6 we saw some similar things about prayer. We looked at prayer and the fight of faith as Paul discusses there the great spiritual battle that we are involved in and the importance

of prayer in the midst of this battle. At the beginning of that section, in Ephesians 6:10, Paul writes, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.” Again, we have to realize that we are dependent on God for everything. In the fight of faith, we have to fight in His strength, not our strength. We are instructed, then, in verses 18 and following, to pray “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.” Then Paul says, “and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” We studied those verses and talked about how we are to pray at all times, pray in the Spirit, keep alert, pray for all the saints, and pray for boldness.

Then last week we focused on praying for revival, and we studied the prayers of Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. In his prayer in chapter 1, Paul gives thanks *to God* for the faith and love evident in the lives of the Ephesian believers. He knows that God has done this work in their lives, so he thanks God for these blessings. The content of his prayer, then, is to pray that these people would see God. This is what we all so desperately need, and what we so deeply desire. This is the only thing that will truly satisfy the cravings of our soul. We were made to behold greatness and delight in greatness. We were made to see God and be satisfied in Him.

In his prayer in Ephesians 3 Paul prays for power. And the power he prays for is the power and strength to comprehend the love of Christ. “to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” To see God, and to comprehend the love of Christ, is to be changed. And this is what we’re praying for when we pray for revival. We want to see God and be changed by Him.

Paul concludes that prayer with an inspiring doxology that attributes all the glory to God. “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” So in praying for revival in our own lives and in our church and community, we give thanks to God for His sovereign work, we pray that we and others would see God for who He is, we pray for power to comprehend the love of Christ, and we praise God for His great power and glory. And in all of this we are acknowledging our need and recognizing God’s infinite power.

So in these weeks of considering the matter of prayer, we have seen many of the same points repeated. And the same will be

true this morning. We pray to God because we are needy, and because He is powerful. And we want to see Him glorifying Himself by working powerfully among us. We want Him to give us grace in the fight of faith. We want Him to revive us. And this morning we'll focus on praying for missions. Our desire is that He will sanctify us and revive us, and as that happens our delight in Him will overflow in a desire to draw others into this delight we have in God. So we'll pray that God's power will be shown in more and more places around the globe, among all the peoples of the world.

The Missionary Prayer of Psalm 67

This is the passionate plea of Psalm 67. This Psalm communicates this overflow of joy that I'm talking about. This is the kind of attitude that I hope God will cultivate in our hearts. This is the kind of prayer I want us to be praying and the kind of passion I want to see growing among us.

The beginning of this prayer is modeled after the priestly prayer of Numbers 6. You may recognize this prayer. God instructed Moses to tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people with this blessing, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26). And the Lord said, "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (v. 27).

In Psalm 67 the psalmist is praying for this very thing to happen. He is praying for God's grace and God's blessing. He is praying that God's face will shine upon us. The blessing that's implied here is the blessing of seeing God and knowing Him personally and intimately. That's what it means for God's face to shine upon us. Oh God, we want to see Your face. We want to know You. We want Your favor to be on us. We want your grace and your blessing to be upon us. What a wonderful way to pray for our own souls, and what a wonderful way to pray for our church.

But the prayer doesn't stop with a request for personal blessing. In fact, the main point of the prayer comes in verse 2. The psalmist asks for blessing in verse 1, and then the purpose of the prayer is seen in verse 2, "that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations." In the Hebrew the first word in verse 2 is an infinitive construct with a lamed preposition attached to it, which expresses purpose. The purpose of the blessing is that the blessing will extend to all nations. We're praying to be blessed so that we can be a channel of blessings to others.

Charles Spurgeon wrote about these verses. He said, “As showers which first fall upon the hills afterwards run down in streams into the valleys, so the blessing of the Most High comes upon the world through the church. We are blessed for the sake of others as well as ourselves. God deals in a way of mercy with his saints, and then they make that way known far and wide, and the Lord’s name is made famous in the world.”

God has blessed us so richly by making his face to shine upon us. He has revealed Himself to us and saved us from our sin. He has regenerated our hearts and made us new creatures in Christ. He has forgiven our sin and imputed to us the righteousness of Christ. And these blessings must extend far beyond us. The river of blessing must flow through us to others.

This prayer for the nations continues throughout the rest of the Psalm. “Let the peoples praise you, O God.” “Let the nations be glad and sing for you.” “Let all the ends of the earth fear him!” This is a missionary Psalm, and the psalmist can hardly contain his excitement. He desperately wants all the world to know and delight in God.

Praying God’s Promises

The requests of this prayer are grounded in the promise that God made to Abraham back in Genesis 12. This should be a lesson to us. We ought to pray the promises of the Bible. That’s what this psalmist is doing. He is taking the promises of Genesis 12 and praying for God to accomplish what He has already promised to do. In Genesis 12 God told Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham), “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3). What an amazing promise! God blessed Abraham in order to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham.

This is accomplished through the life and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We learn in Galatians 3 that Abraham’s offspring are all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. And we know from the word of praise in Revelation 5:9 that Christ was slain, and with his blood he ransomed for God people from every tribe and language and people and nation. So this is how the blessing promised to Abraham will be fulfilled. Through Christ’s sacrifice, individuals from every ethnicity will be saved. Men and women from every people group will repent of their sins and put their trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. This is the Good News of Jesus Christ, that He has died for hell-deserving

sinners like us. And if this is new to you I want to plead with you to embrace this amazing news and this amazing Savior. Turn away from sin. Don't put your hope in yourself. Humble yourself before God and cry out to Him for mercy. Because of the perfect life of Christ, and His sacrificial death in our place, and His triumphant resurrection, we can be saved from the punishment we deserve for our sin and we can freely receive the inheritance of heaven. This is the Gospel that we must embrace and we must take to the nations.

Because those whom He ransomed have not yet all been converted. There are still peoples who have not heard the Gospel. There are entire ethnic groups which have not been reached with this News about Christ. It *will* happen. Jesus says in Matthew 24:14, "this gospel of the kingdom *will be* proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." It's going to happen. But the mission is not yet complete, and we get to be part of God's work in bringing these promises to fulfillment.

Matthew Henry says about this passage in Psalm 67, "Those that have themselves experimentally [meaning, experientially] known the pleasantness of God's ways, and the comforts of his salvation, cannot but desire and pray that they may be known to others, even among all nations."¹ So let's pray like this psalmist prays, and let's live with a passion for God's blessings to spread throughout the world. We want to be involved in what God is doing around us and around the world. God is drawing people to Himself. He is transforming hard hearts into hearts that praise Him. And that's the psalmist's prayer, and that's our prayer: "Let all the peoples praise you, O God." We want to see all the peoples of Pittsburgh praising God. We want the people in all the different neighborhoods of this city to worship God. And we want opportunities to go to other parts of this country and other countries in the world to preach and teach and minister to needs in Jesus Name. This is our desire, as we express it in our mission statement: to delight in the beauty of God's greatness, to proclaim the truth of God's Word, and to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ *among all the peoples (all the people groups, all the ethnic groups) of Pittsburgh and the world.*

God's Glory and the Joy of the Nations

Psalm 67 is such a great missionary prayer for us to incorporate into our hearts and our desires. Let's cry out to God to

¹Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume.* Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Ps 68:1

bless us and make us a blessing. Let's pray that God would be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, so that His way would be known on earth and so that His saving power would be known among all nations. Let's pray that the peoples will praise God, and that they will be glad and sing for joy. We want our delight in God to overflow in a contagious way that ignites that same passion in others and extends to various ethnic groups, both near to us and far from us.

It's our prayer that all the ends of the earth would fear God, as the Psalmist concludes this prayer. So many people, and entire people groups, are plodding through life without any sense of fear or awe or reverence for the one true God of the universe. And we want them to fear Him. Both because we want them to experience the gladness and joy of seeing God, and because we want God to be glorified in their praise of Him. As John Piper puts it so succinctly, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." And that is what we're praying to happen in our own lives and among the nations. We want God to be glorified. And we want the nations to be satisfied *in God*. And these two things come together as we pray according to God's Word. To quote Matthew Henry again, and to show that what Piper says is not anything new, Henry writes in the early 1700s, "Those that delight in praising God themselves cannot but desire that others also may be brought to praise him, that he may have the honour of it and they may have the benefit of it."² God gets the glory. We get the blessing. And we pray that God will get more and more glory as He blesses the nations and draws them to Himself to delight in worshipping Him. We make requests concerning God's glory and with God's glory as the ultimate purpose of our requests. And we pray that as God is glorified among all the nations, as the nations praise God, that the nations would be glad and sing for joy.

"Joy to the World" is one of the great songs we sing during this Christmas season, and we ought to pray this as well throughout the year. It's based on Psalm 98 which is similar to Psalm 67. And Isaac Watts writes in this hymn, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come; let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing. No more let sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love."

²Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Ps 68:1

Practical Suggestions in Praying for Missions

What I want to do now is challenge us in some specific ways concerning our prayers for missions. These are just several bullet points of how we can cultivate this prayer and this passion into our lives.

Pray passages like Psalm 67. Pray over passages like the ones I've mentioned this morning and the ones we've studied in Sunday School over the last several weeks. Consider the call of Abram in Genesis 12, the promise of Matthew 24:14, the Great Commission of Matthew 28, Jesus' statement in Acts 1:8, the word of praise in Revelation 5:9, and many other passages. Praise God for His power and His great promises to bless the nations, and pray that He will accomplish those promises and use us to do that.

Pray for missionaries who are on the field. And I would encourage you to pray very specifically for missionaries with whom we have a connection. We can pray generally for all the missionaries who are serving in various parts of the world. But we should also pray very specifically for certain missionaries who are supported by our church or have some link with us. Do what you can to get to know the specifics about their families and their ministries and the countries in which they serve. Our prayers mean so much to these missionaries. God uses our prayers powerfully to minister to these missionaries, even when we may not be near enough to minister to them in other ways. Dustin and Kellie Shramek are a missionary couple whom we support, and they are serving as career missionaries in the Middle East. They've just settled there recently. And in a recent prayer update Dustin wrote this at the end of the letter. He said, "Thank you so much for praying. It has been a hard transition for us, but God has been faithful and has sustained us all along the way. We have really felt just how dependent we are on him (this is a good thing to feel!) and are very grateful for how he has kept us. We know that your prayers are a major factor in how he is at work in our lives."

Prayer is powerful and effective, and we need to be praying for these missionaries who have left family and the comforts of America, who are living in very hard places, whose ministries may be very difficult and discouraging. Talk to someone who has been on the mission field for a while and they can tell you about some of the hardships that missionaries face and some specific ways that we can be praying for them: like praying for their marriages and families, praying that God will comfort them when they are lonely or scared or feeling spiritually depleted, praying that God will supernaturally enable them to overcome language and cultural barriers so that the Gospel will take root, praying that these

missionaries will hope in God, and that they will persevere. I think the more we try to understand the details of these missionaries' lives, and the more we try to put ourselves in their shoes, the more we will be inclined to intercede for them.

Pray for those who are seeking to go. There are many men and women who may right now be in college or seminary or some other kind of training or they're waiting for the doors to open for them to go, and their goal is to spend their lives on the mission field in some part of the world where Christ has not been named, some place where the Bible is not available in the language of the people, some place where no churches have yet been planted. And these individuals will face many obstacles as they pursue that dream that God has laid on their heart. So pray for these folks that they will persevere in the training they need, and that God will provide the finances they need to travel and live in another part of the world.

Pray for God to lay it on the hearts of more men and women to go. Jesus tells us in Matthew 9:38, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Let's pray that God would call more and more individuals into frontier missions. That is, mission work among the unreached people groups of the world, which will involve going to some very difficult and discouraging places. It is hard work. But let's pray that God will raise up a myriad of young people and old people who will be so overcome by the excitement of this task that they'll desire to go to those difficult places for the glory of Christ, and that at the end of it all they'll say, like David Livingstone did, "I never made a sacrifice."³

Pray for the church to give financially in order to send missionaries to the ends of the earth. The task of missions is something for all of us to be involved in, whether we go or stay. Missions is not only about those who go. It requires others to stay where we're at and be involved in the work of sending. So it's not a question of whether you should go or stay, as if staying here means you just don't have any obligation to the unreached people groups around the world. It's a question, rather, of whether you are called to go or whether you are called to remain here and be a sender, a rope-holder for those who are going. Every one of us needs to be involved with this in one of these two ways, or we're living in disobedience to the Great Commission. Either we need to

³ In an address at Cambridge University in 1857. Quoted in John Piper, *Desiring God*, page 204.

pick up and go to some place where the Gospel has not been preached, or we need to be actively involved in praying for, funding, and encouraging those who are going to those places. And, of course, whether we go or not we ought to be a witness wherever we are, but I'm thinking here of the least reached areas of the world that have little or no witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some must go, and some must send. This is how it was with William Carey and his friend Andrew Fuller. William Carey had a passion to go, and he did. In 1793 he went to India and remained there for 41 years until he died. Meanwhile, his good friend Andrew Fuller remained in England, serving as a pastor there, and heading up the Baptist Missionary Society, which held the rope for Carey. Our prayer should be that God will raise up many William Carey's from our midst. And we should pray that the rest of us will be like Andrew Fuller and be actively involved in supporting those who have gone and those who are hoping to go.

Pray with and for your children, that they will be missions-minded. As you pray specifically for missionaries, share these things with your family. Use something like the prayer guide we handed out last week, or the Global Prayer Digests that we have at the back, or Operation World, which is a great resource to learn about the spiritual needs in all the different countries around the world. Commit to being a prayer partner for a missionary and pray over the updates that they will send to you. Incorporate these things into your family devotions. Teach your kids about missions, and instill in them from an early age the importance and the privilege of being involved in missions, whether that be by going or sending.

And this may be the most difficult part for parents, but be open to the possibility that God may call your son or daughter to be a career missionary in some far away place. Talk about that as a possibility when you have those discussions about what you're going to be when you grow up. Being a missionary is not just for other people or other people's kids. It's not just for those kind of weird people who like adventure and enjoy eating different kinds of foods and don't think that having a shower every day is very important. We may think that we're too civilized for missionary work. We'll stay here in America and keep our kids here with us. We may give some money, but we'll never go ourselves or encourage our kids to go. That's somehow beneath us. That should not be our attitude. We should remain open to going, and encourage that possibility for our children. Missions is for *us*, not just other people. And missions is for *our* kids, not just other

people's kids. We need to hold this calling in high esteem for our children. We need to tell our kids that it would be a great privilege if God called them and equipped them and sent them to some difficult place where the people have not heard about Christ. This is part of being a sender. We need to be willing to send our own children to the mission field, and that starts by teaching them about missions when they're young.

Pray about going yourself, either on a short-term mission trip, or maybe even for the long-term. Pray risky prayers, bold prayers. Dream big. Think outside the box. God is not limited by your job or your finances or the many obstacles that you may think are insurmountable. Just pray. And see what God lays on your heart and how He leads and what doors He opens up for you. I'm going to Romania in April for 10 days with Bob Ward and some other folks. Maybe God would lead you to go on that trip with us. Or maybe there's another time when you could accompany Bob on a trip to Romania. He goes several times a year. Or maybe you could go visit a missionary in the Middle East and encourage them and minister among the Muslims where they are. Or maybe you could go to China and visit John and Rachel, or go to Brazil and spend some time with the Ridges. There are many opportunities. And God will often use a short-term trip like that to show you if He might be calling you into a longer-term commitment somewhere. Pray about going.

Pray that God will release us from the grip of the American Dream and give us the joy of risking all earthly comforts for the sake of His Name. It is so easy for us to assume that the point of our lives is to be comfortable, to have a nice house, a nice car, to provide a good education for our kids, and to have a fat retirement account. This is the air we breathe. It's all around us, and in us, and those desires captivate our interests and our energies and our passions. We need to pray that God will set us free from these petty ambitions.

On this point, and in closing, I want to tell you a little bit about Dr. Michael Oh, who is the president of Christ Bible Institute in Nagoya Japan. He is not Japanese, though. He is Korean. His father grew up in poverty in Korea through World War II and the Korean war, but was then able to enter medical school and eventually came to the United States and made a life here for him and his family. Michael, then, grew up in the Philadelphia area, and because of his father's success he had many opportunities available to him. He went to college at University of Pennsylvania, and then went on to get graduate degrees from Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, and Trinity Evangelical

Divinity School. And I give you some of this background because Michael shares a moving story of when he told his dad that he wanted to be a missionary. It was on a Sunday during his senior year, and over lunch he shared this news with his dad. Dad, I want to be a missionary. His dad responded, “No.” He said, “Michael, I want you to stay in America. And I want to see you at church every Sunday with your children and have lunch together like this.” Michael responded, “Dad, I appreciate everything that you have done for me. That’s why I can be where I am today. But I refuse to live my life to try to get into a good college, so I can get a good job and make lots of money so that my kids can have every opportunity to get into a good college and get a good job and make lots of money so that their kids can have every opportunity to get into a good college and get a good job and make lots of money!”⁴

I want to encourage all of us, as Michael is wanting to encourage us, don’t be limited by the American Dream. It is a dream far too small. Think bigger than that. Dream bigger than that! Might God be calling you into one of the most exciting vocations imaginable?—that of taking the Gospel to some distant land where Christ has not been named? Don’t settle for the pleasures of this world. Don’t settle for the comforts of this country. Let’s pray for missions, for those who are already on the mission field, for those who are yet to go, for those who are sending, and for ourselves, that God will instill this passion in our hearts and use us for the advancement of His Kingdom!

⁴ From his address at the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors (2009). Manuscript can be found here:

http://www.desiringgod.org/media/pdf/conferences/2009_pascon_michael_oh.pdf