

- I. All right good evening everyone I hope all is going well for you!
 - A. So before we begin, I put the link for the survey about what we are going to study next.
 1. If you have not, can you just take a second and fill that survey out...
 - B. All right so quick recap of where we've been the past two weeks:
 1. We've considered how we meet with God through His Word
 - a) And we explored this concept of Bible intake
 - (1) **SLIDE:** That is, hearing, reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on the Word of God.
 2. This week, we are talking about what it means to meet with God in prayer
 - (1) **SLIDE:** So as we turn to prayer, let me start with a question: what makes someone powerful?
 - (a) They can get things done.....
 - (b) **SLIDE:** Graeme Goldsworthy, an Anglican from Australia who is renowned for his OT teaching, wrote: ***"It is implicit in our nature to want to speak to someone more powerful than we are."***
 - i) Now that is not necessarily scriptural, but it's an observation about the human condition that I think resonates in most of our hearts.
 - ii) And I would suggest that it's one of the reasons we go to God in prayer.
 - (1) He is the almighty God...
 - (a) The one who created the universe from nothing.
 - (b) He is far above us and yet He has made it possible that we can talk to Him.

- ii) So let's open up our time, appropriately, by going to God and asking Him to give us understanding this evening.

II. **SLIDE:** Alright so consider *this* definition of prayer: **“Prayer is the Spirit-given, Word-saturated communication response to dwelling on God.”**

A. So let me point out two things in that definition:

- a) By “response” we mean the outflow of the meditations we've taken from the Word.
 - (1) God has already spoken to us through His Word and so we speak to Him in response to that.
- b) And we put the word “communication” in the definition to accentuate that prayer is our means of communicating with God.
 - (1) It is speaking to God.

B. So what might this communication response to God look like in words?

1. **SLIDE:** Well, consider the acronym ACTS.

- a) It's one of the best ways I've seen to understand and remember how we should respond.
 - (1) **A – Adoration**
 - (2) **C – Confession**
 - (3) **T – Thanksgiving**
 - (4) **S – Supplication** (petitioning or asking the Lord for things to give him glory)
 - (a) Now file that away because we're going to come back to it soon.
 - i) But first we're going to look at the structure of how we pray, I want us to look at what prayer is..

I. **SLIDE: Prayer: A Trinitarian framework**

A. So we believe that the God of the Bible -- our God -- is one God in three persons and that this fact has massive implications for praying.

- 1. He is a relational God...and not because of anything we added.

- a) He wasn't desperate for relationships when He created us.
 - (1) *An attribute of God...we've talked about those before...is that He is **relational** and **communicative**.*
- b) He was in perfect communion with Himself in the three persons of the Godhead before the creation of the world.
 - (1) There was perfect unity and love within the Trinity.
 - (2) **SLIDE:** Now we know this because Jesus, when he prayed to His father just before his betrayal, said this in John 17:24: ***“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”***
 - (a) Here we see not only that the Father loved the Son...
 - i) But also that there was unity between the Father and the Son and the Father had given the Son his glory.
 - (b) The Holy Spirit was also in unity within the Godhead before the foundations of the earth (Hebrew 9:14).
 - (c) We also see that in the unity of three persons of the Trinity, God created the world.
 - i) **SLIDE:** So this is Genesis 1:26...***“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”***
 - (1) The “us” God is talking about the Trinity.
- 2. So we need be people who are Biblical in our understanding of the Bible and prayer...
 - a) And to do that, we must be Biblical in our understanding of God.
 - b) So when we think about praying to our Trinitarian God, we need understand the distinct roles of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

B. SLIDE: The Basis of all Prayer: The Sonship of Jesus

1. On what basis do we, a sinful people, come to a holy God in prayer? He is perfect and we deserve his wrath.
 - a) So how is it that we can come to Him?
 - (1) The answer is found in the person of Jesus Christ, the son of God.
 - b) This has been the thread running through this class by the way...
 - (1) In all our talk of meeting with God, we must understand that it is always through a Mediator.
 - (a) This mediator is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
 - (b) The Son of God is the basis of all prayer.
 - (2) **SLIDE: Hebrews 4:14-16** is the most explicit text on this. *“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. For 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. Let 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.”*
 - (a) Now when are we in a time of need? Always.
2. So from that, let me give you three reasons to have confidence that we can draw near to God:
 - a) **SLIDE: Jesus is our high priest**
 - b) **SLIDE: The acceptance Jesus has with the Father is the acceptance we now have in Him.**
 - (1) **SLIDE: So this is 2 Corinthians 5:21...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

(a) This is what St. Athanasius, a bishop from the 4th century, called the “Great Exchange.”

i) **SLIDE:** That’s St. Athanasius...when you die you’ll see him again in heaven

(1) The Great Exchange is that Jesus took your busted up, messy record...

(a) He died for it

(b) And what He offers you in return is His perfect record

(2) So what that means is that God could not love you any more than He does right now...

(a) Because God sees you like He sees Jesus.

(b) And God could not love and accept Jesus any more than He does...

(3) So just think about what that means for your prayer life if you believed this?

(a) Like for real, if we really believed this, not only with our heads but also our hearts, it would change everything in our lives.

i) Because this is how this works.

ii) What if you could say: ***God here is why you should hear my prayer:***

(1) This week I concluded a 40 day fast.

(a) During that time I met Satan face to face and stared him down...resisting all of his temptations.

(2) I suffered at the hands of some really bad people and responded without complaining or getting angry.

(a) The only time I opened my mouth was actually to forgive people.

(3) Oh and I also walked on water...

(4) Healed a blind guy on the spot

(5) And fed 5000 people with a loaf of bread.

- (b) According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, that is exactly what you can and what you should say.
 - i) Jesus has paid for every ounce of your sin and His perfect life has been credited to you.
- c) **SLIDE: If God hears the prayers of Jesus our high priest, He will also hear our prayers through Jesus...**
 - (1) So according to verses like Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25, Jesus is consistently intercedes for us...
 - (2) This is why he tells us to pray in his name
 - (a) **SLIDE: Right, this is John 14:13 – “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”**
 - (b) So we don't say “in Jesus name” to let God know that we're about to finish up praying...we say “in Jesus name” because that's the calling card He told us to use to get through if you would...

C. SLIDE: The Source of all Prayer: The Fatherhood of God

1. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray this way: *“Our Father who art in heaven...”* The typical pattern of prayer in the NT is to pray to the Father.
 - a) This is not to say that if you pray to Jesus or the Holy Spirit that your prayers will go unanswered.
 - (1) It is to say, however, that the typical pattern of prayer laid out in the New Testament is to pray to the Father.
 - b) The first thing that we should understand is that if we have put our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and recognize that it is through Christ that we have access to God...then God is our Father.
 - (1) And praise God for that...we are His children.
 - (a) And that notion is so fundamental when it comes to prayer...
2. **SLIDE: There's an access to God that we have with His children...**

- a) It makes me think of that famous picture of John F. Kennedy Jr. underneath his dad's desk.
- (1) Right you remember that picture?
 - (2) JFK is reading papers at his desk in the Oval Office running the country and John Jr. is peaking out from under the desk.
 - (a) The whole world knew John F. Kennedy as the leader of the free world
 - i) President of the United States
 - ii) Symbol of freedom and democracy
 - iii) *Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country...*
 - iv) *We choose to go to the moon...we choose to go to the moon and do the other things to do the other things, not because they are easy but because they are hard...*
 - v) This titan on the world's stage...
 - (3) But the little kid peaking out from under the desk, just knew him as dad.
3. **SLIDE:** Interestingly, Paul Miller who wrote an excellent book called *A Praying Life* says how we approach God in prayer is where we demonstrate whether we really understand the gospel.
- a) He writes: ***“When we slow down to pray, we are immediately confronted with how unspiritual we are...in contrast, children never get frozen by their selfishness. They come just as they are, totally self-absorbed. Jesus tells us to become like a little child when we pray... How do little children ask? They just say what is on their minds. They have no awareness of what is appropriate or inappropriate. This isn’t just a random observation about how parents respond to little children. This is the gospel.”***

b) **SLIDE:** This is exactly what Jesus says in Luke 11:11-13 —. ***“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”***

(1) Look if my kids asks for a chicken nugget, I’m not going to be like, *“OK hold out your hand, here’s a water moccasin...”*

(a) No, I give him a chicken nugget. I give him a good gift.

(b) It’s the same with God.

i) He is a giver of good gifts.

D. SLIDE: The Enabling of all Prayer: The Power of the Holy Spirit

1. So recognize this: We cannot come to God in prayer outside of faith in Christ.

a) **SLIDE:** So the first way that the Holy Spirit empowers us to pray is by drawing us to a **saving faith** in Christ.

(1) **SLIDE: John 3:5-6** – *“Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*

b) **SLIDE:** The second way that the Holy Spirit empowers us to pray is this: He **assures** us of our adoption in Christ

(1) **SLIDE:** This is Romans 8:16: **“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...”**

(2) **SLIDE:** Ephesians 1:13-14 – **“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,**

who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory."

c) **SLIDE:** Lastly, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us before the Father

(1) **SLIDE: Romans 8:26-27** – *"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. 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."

(a) We can take great courage in the fact that we have access to God the Father through the mediation of God the Son...

i) And that God the Holy Spirit draws us to faith in Christ...

ii) Assures us that we are truly adopted into the family of God...

iii) And helps us pray when we do not know how.

E. SLIDE: Question: How do the petitions for things like daily bread and forgiveness free believers to live more committed and surrendered lives for Christ?

II. SLIDE: THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER

A. **SLIDE:** Let me ask you a question that I hope will flesh out an important truth: **"Why isn't prayer alone enough to sustain our fellowship with God?"**

1. Put differently, why do we need to spend so much time in the Word when we can just pray?

2. Because exhausting God's unique and authoritative revelation in His word is the first action of Biblical spirituality.

a) Other components must come in its wake...this is a hard truth but...

(1) This is because God's word is objective while the other disciplines...

(a) Including prayer, are relatively subjective.

- (b) Because of this we need to be grounded in the objective word of God before we can know how to pray.
- (c) If we neglect God's word, we'll tend to hear what we want to hear, not necessarily what God wants us to hear.
- i) **SLIDE:** Let me give you a hard example. In Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865, he says these words regarding the North and the South: **Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes.**
- b) If you remember last week, we discussed how reading passages of scripture, and especially being familiar with the entirety of scripture, guards us against taking verses out of context and employing them to our sinful ends.
- (1) We'll be talking about that when we talk about slavery in Scripture this Sunday...
- (2) Because in the same way, being grounded in God's Word guards us against using prayer only to hear what we want to hear.
- (a) **SLIDE:** So let me summarize this. **The Word of God is primary in prayer because, without it, we don't know how to pray properly.**
- i) Graeme_Goldsworthy puts it well. *"If prayer is not addressed to God in terms of what is real, it is a fantasy. The prior word of God is established from the outset as the ground for any human understanding of reality."*

B. **SLIDE:** And it's taking this realistic and humble view that should drive us to rely on God's word as we pray. So think about the ACTS model:

1. **ADORATION.** How do we know how to Adore God rightly?
 - a) We know His attributes, which have been revealed through scripture.
 - b) We can adore God because he has made himself known to us.
2. **CONFESSION.** How can we know how to Confess to God?
 - a) We see, through scripture, the ways we fall short of God's standard.
 - b) If we are going to figure it out on our own, we're going to orient it around ourselves in some way, by either being too legalistic or too light in our definition of holiness.
3. **THANKSGIVING.** How are we to properly Thank God?
 - a) How can we if we don't appreciate that everything we have comes from him?
 - b) We know this through our Word.
4. **SUPPLICATION.** And how are we to know to ask God if not for him teaching us how we are to be?
 - a) We want our prayers of supplication, in particular, to be instructed by God's Word...
 - (1) Or that is not yet accomplished, and appealing to Him for that.
 - b) Because it's in these prayers that we're recognizing something good that God has declared that we do not have...
 - (1) Or that is not yet accomplished, and appealing to Him for that.

C. So let me give you three things about how the Word helps us pray

1. **SLIDE: Being grounded in God's word in prayer makes us God-centered**
 - a) It points us to the glory of God which, in turn, diverts us from being "me-centered" in prayer.
 - (1) Because we want our prayers to be "God-centered."
 - (2) We want to pray for things that will bring God glory, not just make our individual lives easier.

- (a) Listen: If God hasn't been answering your prayers like you'd expect, maybe camp out right here and consider these questions:
 - i) What is your motivation in prayer?
 - ii) Is it the glory of the Lord, or your own personal ambition?
- (1) I think honest answers to those questions may be convicting and insightful.

2. **SLIDE: Being grounded in God's word helps us to pray according to His will**

- a) If our prayers are to be answered, we must pray according to God's will, and we cannot know God's will apart from His word.

(1) **SLIDE:** So I'll say it like this: **the prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven.**

- (a) So, we want to ground our prayers in Scripture.

(2) **SLIDE:** Mark Batterson says it like this: **"One thing is certain: Our most powerful prayers are hyperlinked to the promises of God. When you know you are praying the promises of God, you can pray with holy confidence."**

3. **SLIDE: Being grounded in God's word helps us to pray with the Holy Spirit**

- a) The Spirit is the one responsible for extending God's kingdom on earth and He's the one who knows the will of God...because He is God.

(1) So, prayer is supposed to be a two-way conversation as the Holy Spirit reveals what he wants for God's kingdom.

- (a) The Spirit is actually supposed to pray through you.

(b) **SLIDE:** Let me give you this from Paul Miller: **"We need the sharp-edged, absolute character of the Word and the intuitive, personal leading of the Spirit. The Word provides the structure, the vocabulary. The Spirit personalizes it to our lives. If we believe**

Scripture only applies to people in general, then we can miss how God intimately personalizes his counsel to us as individuals. We can become deists, effectively removing God from our lives. But everywhere in Scripture we see God speaking to us with a personal touch, prompting us to obey and love.”

(2) Now I want to be careful here because again like we talked about earlier...

prayer can a subjective thing...that's why we need the Word...

(a) Perhaps the most destructive three words in human history have been

“God told me...”

(b) So, again I want to be careful but there are 59 times that the Holy Spirit shows up in the book of Acts...59.

i) Of the 59 the Holy Spirit shows up...in 36 of them He is speaking...

ii) Now here's what's frustrating about studying those passages:

(1) Scripture never really tells you how He's speaking

(2) So as an example...Acts 13:2: the Holy Spirit said to the church,

“Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work of the ministry...”

(a) I don't know how He said it...

(b) I don't think everybody got an alert on their phone at the same time...that would be cool but I don't think it happened that way.

iii) I actually think the ambiguity is intentional because I think there should be a lot of humility in what we're hearing from the Holy Spirit because again...more havoc has been wreaked from the phrase *“God just told me...”* than probably any other phrase ever...

(1) There should be some humility because when we say, “God told me”...the Bible should be open and there should be a chapter and verse to back it up...

(3) I want to encourage you to develop what's called the habit of "listening prayer."

(a) The Holy Spirit prayed through the church in Acts and I think its clear that He still does it today so consider this for your prayer time then:

"God, I don't want to just pray to you, I want to pray with you. So, move in me as I pray."

4. So it's through God's word that we will learn the heart, desires, and priorities of God, in addition to his attributes and qualities.

a) Just think about this: in sanctification, we are becoming more like God; so this should be the driver of our prayer.

(1) We should be looking to God's word for direction in the things we should be praying about.

III. So let's break this down a bit for the sake of practicality. We've had a lot of theory I know. Let's talk about practice.

A. **SLIDE:** Five categories of prayer and how scripture instructs us:

1. SLIDE: For yourself: physical needs.

a) Praying for your work.

b) God cares about these things! Jesus tells us to pray, "Give us this day, our daily bread."

(1) But in this we're instructed to not worry about what comes tomorrow.

(2) The birds are well fed and the flowers are well clothed, and God says we're worth more than they are!

(a) Aren't you worth more than a blue jay?

(b) Aren't you more valuable than sod?

i) Don't you think that if you have a heavenly Father who cares about grass and about flowers and about birds...if that's the nature of God

to take care of these little things...don't you think He'll take care of you?

- ii) I mean if our God is a God who makes sure birds get taken care of and that flowers are pretty, don't you think He's going to care about your security and your beauty since your His child?
- iii) Stands to reason.

2. SLIDE: For yourself: spiritual needs.

- a) Grow in your boldness to share the gospel.
 - (1) We often care too much about what people think of us, such that we're not willing to risk the relational capital we have with them to share the gospel.
 - (2) We need to grow in boldness, because we're instructed through scripture to not be ashamed of the gospel.
 - (a) Romans 1:16: **"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..."**
 - i) Prayer helps us with that.

3. SLIDE: For others: the church.

- a) What do you pray for people in the church or in your small group?
 - (1) Find scripture and pray it over them.

4. SLIDE: For others: your family.

5. SLIDE: For God's work in the world.

- a) His will be done...on earth as it is in heaven.
- b) Ultimately, one of the things we want to do in prayer is use what we learn about God through His word to shape the things that our heart cares about.
 - (1) Remember the verse: Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
 - (a) One of your most valuable treasures is your time...

(b) If you are spending time going to God in response to what you've learned about Him through the scriptures, your heart is going to be shaped to value those same things that He does.

(c) And you're going to see him answer those prayers in amazing ways.

B. **SLIDE:** Praying scripture

1. Another practical way to pray is to pray scripture.

a) **SLIDE:** Don Carson, in his book on the prayers of Paul wrote, **“Just as God’s Word must reform our theology, our ethics, and our practices, so also must it reform our praying.”**

(1) As we've said, let the scripture guide our praying.

(2) There are countless prayers in scripture that would be very good things for us to pray. For example:

(a) **SLIDE:** Philippians 1:9-11: **“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”**

(b) Do you know how to confess your sins to God? Psalm 51 is a great template:

i) **SLIDE:** Psalm 51:1-4: **Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...”**

2. The Scriptures are the very thoughts and words of God.

- a) When we pray God's thoughts after Him, we can trust that He will not only hear but answer those prayers.
 - (1) We don't have questions about whether we're praying God's will if we're praying scripture because scripture speaks the will of God.
 - (a) The scriptures will keep our prayers from being too general and too stale and trite.
 - i) And it will help us to pray what John Piper calls "*big, sweeping but not insipid prayers.*"
 - (1) Like sometimes I think we just pray things because its just stuff we say: ...
 - (a) Like I'm still not sure what we're doing when we pray for our food sometimes: "*Lord, bless this food and the hands that prepared it.*"
 - (2) You ever think why just the hands?
 - (a) Why not the whole body?
 - (b) But, see, that's a question you are not allowed to ask.
 - (3) Next time you pray over a meal, try asking God to bless the feet or the kidneys of the people that prepared it.
 - (a) See where that gets you.
 - (b) But for real I just think that here is something kind of weak about praying, "*God, bless the missionaries.*"
 - i) There's no thought in that.
 - (1) We don't know what the blessing is.
 - (2) We don't know who the missionaries are.
 - (3) But, that doesn't mean we can't pray really big prayers for all the missionaries or all the saints.

- (a) **SLIDE:** As Piper says, *“Big general prayers become powerful when they are filled up with concrete, radical Biblical goals for the people we are praying for.”*

C. **SLIDE:** Above all, just start.

1. Prayer is a muscle that grows as you use it.
 - a) The more you do it, the more you know how to do it, and the more you desire to do it.
 - (1) So, start with 5 min a day if that is all you can handle, and commit to doing it every day for a month.
 - (2) And see where it goes from there.
2. **SLIDE:** Here are some practical possibilities for getting your prayer life going to conclude:
 - a) Take a morning walk with no devices and pray out loud.
 - b) Set reminders on your calendar to pray for specific needs at specific times.
 - c) Use a prayer app like Echoprayer, Prayermate, or Evernote
 - (1) This can help you organize and keep track of prayer needs.
 - d) Do prayer cards:
 - (1) A card where you put a name, prayer requests and verses of Scripture you are believing for these people...
 - e) Pray in the moment with people, don't just promise to pray for them.
 - (1) Rob and I at the restaurant with waiters and waitresses
 - f) Prayer walk your neighborhood, the office, or some part of the city.
 - (1) Don't be weird.
 - (2) No hands raised, don't try to be sneaky and anoint things with oil.
 - (a) Why is the water cooler greasy?
 - g) Try 2–3 short times of prayer instead of one long one:
 - (1) Morning, after lunch, before bed.

- h) Pray regularly with your kids or grandkids.
 - (1) Let them hear you pray, use a kids version of ACTS – “Wow, Sorry, Thanks, Help”
- i) Use a prayer companion in your daily time with God:
 - (1) The Valley of Vision.
 - (a) These are short—only a page each—and you can just pray them, personalizing them for where you are.
 - (2) The Songs of Jesus, Tim Keller