

Principles of Effective Prayer:

Reflections on the Lord's Prayer

Scripture: *Mathew 6:9-15.*

Exegetical Big Idea: The Lord's Prayer reminds us of the *purpose* of prayer, what lends *power* to our prayer, and the *perspective* we should bring to our prayer.

Introduction

In **Matthew 6:9-15**, as part of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presented to His disciples a pattern of prayer that we have come to commonly refer to as the Lord's Prayer.

It seems to me that we can discern three principles of effective prayer from this pattern of prayer. The first principle relates to the *purpose* of prayer. The second principle shows us what lends *power* to our petitions in prayer. The third principle relates to the *perspective* that we should bring to prayer. On the church calendar, today is *Pentecost Sunday*. Considering the role of prayer on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2** I think it's quite appropriate that we are reflecting on prayer this morning.

I. The Purpose of Prayer (Verses 9, 12, 14-15)

- 1) The first words of the Lord's Prayer, in **verse 9**, are: *Our Father in heaven*. The word *Our* is a possessive plural pronoun that speaks of community. *Father* speaks of parental relationship. *Heaven* speaks of the unseen spiritual realm that is far above us in love, in knowledge, in power, and in wisdom. These first words of the Lord's Prayer, therefore, remind us that prayer is uniquely an activity of those in the community of persons who have entered into a personal spiritual relationship with God in which they see God as their Father in heaven. This is confirmed by the fact that we read in **Matt. 5:1** that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, of which this teaching about prayer was a part, was addressed to His disciples.
- 2) **John 1:12-13** reminds us that although all human beings are the creation of God only those who have received Christ into their lives by placing their faith in Him are given the right by God to be His spiritual children who can address Him as *Our Father in heaven*. Our acceptance by God to become His children is on the basis of His forgiveness of our sins that Christ earned for us on the cross. This is why in **verses 12, 14** and **15** of this passage the Lord mentions our need to forgive those who have wronged us.

- 3) The Lord reminds us with these words that as recipients of God's forgiveness we obviously need to extend that forgiveness to others if we do not want anything to hinder our prayers.
- 4) The next words of the Lord's Prayer, still in **verse 9**, are: *Hallowed be your name*. These are words of worship that express our thanksgiving to God and our worship of Him as our heavenly Father to whom we have come in prayer. Although we commonly use the word *worship* to refer to the music we sing in church, in the original old English, this word was *worth-ship* that means *to acknowledge the worth of a person or object*. To worship, therefore, means to declare, or to demonstrate great admiration, devotion, or reverence towards a person or an object in recognition of their merit, their *worthiness*.
- 5) When we begin our prayers with this sense of our worship of God we shift our focus from the size of our difficulties and needs to the worthiness and the great size of the God to whom we have come in prayer.
- 6) We see an example of how the disciples who first received this teaching about prayer from the Lord applied this principle in **Acts 4:18-31**. Threatened with arrest and imprisonment by the Jewish leaders for preaching about Jesus, when they came to the place of prayer, the disciples began with these words of worship in **verse 24**: *Sovereign Lord, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them*. By beginning their prayer with these words of worship, the big problem they faced suddenly didn't seem so big after all, compared to the size of their heavenly Father to whom they were praying and the Lord responded to their prayer in quite an amazing way.
- 7) So, we can see that the first verse of the Lord's Prayer indicates that the primary *purpose* of prayer is acknowledging our relationship of humble dependence on God, nurturing our intimacy with Him, *as we saw last week*, and expressing our worship of Him as our heavenly Father.

II. The Power of our Prayer (Verses 11 & 13)

- 1) **Verse 11** says *Give us today our daily bread* and **verse 13** says *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*. These two verses express our request for the Lord's provision of our material needs and our request for the Lord's spiritual protection. We present these requests to the Father on the basis of our faith in His willingness and His ability to meet these needs. This means that what lends power to our petitions in prayer *is our faith* in the willingness and the ability of God our heavenly Father to meet both our material and spiritual needs.

- 2) This is why, teaching about faith and prayer in **Mark 11:24**, Jesus said: *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*
- 3) An important fact to note about this is that the power that our faith lends to our prayer does not depend on the size of our faith. It depends, instead, on the size of the God to whom we are praying in faith. This is why in **Matt. 17:20**, Jesus said: *Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move.* Again, we see from **Acts 12:1-17**, how the disciples applied this principle in their ministry. Here, we see that although they were diligently praying for Peter's release (**verse 12**) their faith was obviously the size of a mustard seed. Yet look at the great miracle God accomplished through their mustard seed faith.
- 4) So we do not come to prayer having faith in our faith, as the prosperity doctrine mistakenly teaches. We come to prayer having faith in God. This is why, again, teaching about prayer, Jesus said in **Mark 11:22**: *Have faith in God.* The prosperity doctrine teaches that if a Christian lacks health and wealth it is because they lack faith. This teaching is clearly contrary to Paul's experience in **2 Cor. 12:6-10** where although Paul had great faith, his request for the removal of his thorn in the flesh was answered by God in a way Paul did not expect. God said to Paul: *My grace is sufficient for you* so that the problem that Paul was praying about would give God the opportunity to display His power and sufficiency in Paul's situation.
- 5) This can be true in our own lives today with regard to any need we bring in faith to the Lord in prayer. The Lord's seemingly negative response to our prayer may very well be His way of moving us from self-sufficiency to God-dependency so that His sufficient grace can be seen in our lives.
- 6) Our faith in the place of prayer is based on our confidence in God's willingness and ability to meet our needs in a manner that is best for us *and* on our remembrance of what the Lord has done for us in the past. This is why in **verse 8** of this same chapter, the Lord declared that: *Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*
- 7) This means that in the place of prayer we should not be vague as if we are not sure if God will really answer us. We should come with the certainty and assurance that our faith in our loving heavenly Father's willingness and ability to meet both our material and spiritual needs lends real *power* to our prayers.

III. The Right Perspective of our Prayer (Verse 10)

- 1) **Verse 10** says: *Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* These words indicate that the perspective that we should bring to prayer is the doing of the Lord's will concerning whatever it is we are praying about. This is why the verse began with the words, *your kingdom come*. One Bible scholar has very well defined the kingdom of God as *God's people living in God's place under God's rule and therefore enjoying God's blessing*. So, when we pray by saying *your will be done on earth as it is in heaven* we are declaring that as God's people in His Kingdom who have willingly placed ourselves under His wise and providential rule, we wish to see His will, and not ours, done in our lives, through the petitions that we bring to Him in prayer. Jesus Himself is our supreme example of this when in the Garden of Gethsemane, in **Matt. 26:39**, He prayed by saying: *Nevertheless not my will but, your will be done*.

- 2) Bringing this perspective to our prayers is important because any prayer that receives a favorable answer from God first begins with Him and His will because prayer is not twisting God's arm and forcing Him to do our will. You see, if this is what prayer is, then it means we have reversed the roles and God has become our servant, and we have become His Master, so that He has to do whatever we please.

- 3) This is why the Apostle John wrote this in **I John 5:14-15**: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.* This tells us that when we are sure that we are praying according to the will of God we need to persevere in prayer as Jesus encouraged His disciples to do in **Luke 18:1-9**.

- 4) So, how can we be sure that the needs we bring to the Lord in prayer are indeed according to His will? Well, listen to this abridged version of **Rom. 8:26-27**: *We do not know what we ought to pray for but the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.* This tells us that one of the essential roles that God the Holy Spirit plays in our lives is to help us to pray according to the will of God the Father. Let me give you two examples of this; one from the Bible, and one from my own personal experience. First example; In **James 5:17-18**, the Apostle James cites the example of Elijah who prayed that there would be no rain and there was no rain, and again he prayed that there would be rain and there was rain. James was referring to **I Kings 17:1** where Elijah boldly declared to the idolatrous King Ahab: *As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.*

- 5) Elijah based his prayers on this issue on the will of God revealed in **Deut. 28:15 & 23-24** where God declared that one of the consequences that the children would suffer from idolatry would be a lack of rain. Because Elijah was praying according to this revealed will of God, that is exactly what happened. So, when in his narration of this story about Elijah James concluded by declaring in **James 5:16** that *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective* what he meant is that praying in faith according to the will of God is *powerful and effective*.
- 6) Second example; *Willie car accident*. You see, in His Word the Lord has asked us to depend on Him for our needs, so we know that the legitimate needs that we bring to God in prayer, guided by His HS, are according to His will and we can expect Him to respond favorably, such as we see in these two examples.
- 7) All this shows us that for our prayers to be effective the *perspective* that we always need to bring to prayer is the doing of the Lord's will concerning whatever it is we are praying about, and not primarily the doing of our will.

Conclusion

I hope these **3P's** from the Lord's Prayer in **Matthew 6:9-15**, will encourage you to pray without ceasing, as the Apostle Paul rejoins us to do in **1 Thess. 5:17**.

Here are four steps you can personally use to apply these three principles of effective prayer: 1) Begin with *Adoration*; Worship – this calms our troubled minds. 2) *Confess* our sins; Repentance. 3) *Thank* Him; Thanksgiving. 4) Offer our *Supplications* to Him; Bring our petitions in *faith*, according to His *will*. The acronym for this is: **ACTS**.

End with the story of Joseph Scriven, writer of the hymn, *What A Friend We Have in Jesus*.

Let us pray!

*Rev. Emmanuel Kwasi Amofo,
Tigoni,
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