

Prayer as an Expression of Our Dependence on God

Prayer and Fasting Seminar – January 23-24th, 2009

“Prayer is simply talking to God but prayer is primarily about expressing our dependence on God by declaring God’s **sovereignty** and **empathy** in all things.”

“Follow Me” – Dave VanAcker

Start with Rick Warren’s Invocation – 2009 Presidential Inauguration

Prayer Testimonies:

David Brainerd:

“Wednesday, April 20. Set apart this day for fasting and prayer, to bow my soul before God for the bestowment of divine grace; especially that all my spiritual afflictions and inward distresses might be sanctified to my soul. And endeavoured also to remember the goodness of God to me the year past, this day being my birth-day. Having obtained help of God, I have hitherto lived, and am now arrived at the age of twenty-five years. My soul was pained to think of my barrenness and deadness; that I have lived so little to the glory of the eternal God. I spent the day in the woods alone, and there poured out my complaint to God. O that God would enable me to live to his glory for the future!” (*The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* by Jonathan Edwards)

Hudson Taylor:

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was pouring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four A. M. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God (*Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret* [Chicago: Moody Press, n.d., original 1932], p. 235).

John Paton’s Dad:

Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and "shut to the door"; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil of the Most Holy Place. We occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tiptoe, not to disturb the holy colloquy. The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light as of a new-born smile that always was dawning on my father's face: it was a reflection from the Divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived. Never, in temple or cathedral, on mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking with men, than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and oaken wattles. Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, or blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in the Sanctuary closet, and, hearing still echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, 'He walked with God, why may not I?' (*John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides*)

1. Prayer is simply talking to God...

I like what Pastor Dave recently said in his sermon on prayer:

“Prayer, in its broadest form, is simply communication with God, where we open our hearts to God in the form of requests, confession, and thankfulness. We learn this directly from Paul.

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

What is Prayer? D. L. Moody

There is a story about D. L. Moody making a visit to Scotland in the 1800's and opening one of his talks at a local grade school with the rhetorical question, What is prayer? To his amazement, hundreds of children's hands went up. So he decided to call on a lad near the front, who promptly stood up and said, "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies." This is the answer to question #98 in the Westminster Catechism. To this Moody responded by saying, "Be thankful, son, that you were born in Scotland." (In Scotland they learned catechisms)

2. ...Prayer is primarily about expressing our dependence on God...

1. We are completely dependent on God.
2. We often fail to act based upon our complete dependence on God.
3. Being a follower of Jesus means living a life that continually recognizes and acts based on our dependence on God, namely trust.
4. Prayer is one of the primary ways of expressing our dependence on God.

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:11)

Give us this day our daily bread

Psalms 50:15

And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Pray without ceasing. John Piper writes about what this means –

“it means that there is a spirit of dependence that should permeate all we do. This is the very spirit and essence of prayer. So, even when we are not speaking consciously to God, there is a deep, abiding dependence on him that is woven into the heart of faith. In that sense, we "pray" or have the spirit of prayer continuously.”

Jonathan Edwards wrote in a sermon on prayer:

...With respect to *God*, prayer is but a sensible acknowledgment of our dependence on him to his glory. As he has made all things for his own glory, so he will be glorified and acknowledged by his creatures.

Here are some all things we are dependent on God for.

We are dependent on God...

1. For our very breath to live.
2. For the forgiveness of sins and the imputed righteousness of Christ.
3. For the forgiveness of ongoing sins and restored fellowship with Him.
4. For growth in godliness and overcoming present sin.
5. For overcoming the painful effects of past sins.
6. For a love and devotion for God.
7. For a right understanding, delight and obedience to His Word.
8. For a consistent faithful prayer life.
9. For the right things to pray for.
10. For answered prayer.
11. For faithfulness and fruitfulness in evangelism.
12. For the salvation of those we love.
13. For fruitfulness in all our relationships (family, church, neighbors, work, etc.).
14. For faithfulness to our spouse.
15. For grace to glorify God in difficult or painful relationships.
16. For the ability to love our enemies and endure evil.
17. For the ability to forgive sins against us.
18. For power to use our spiritual gifts for the glory of God and good of His church.
19. For genuine humility.
20. For a genuine love of others.
21. For fruitful labor in our jobs.
22. For health and length of life.
23. For sustaining grace when health is gone.
24. For the ability to be content in all things and rejoice evermore.
25. For the ability to exercise.
26. For the helpful assistance of doctors and medicine.
27. For the ability to sleep.
28. For the ability to have energy in the day to do what you need to do.
29. For physical provision.
30. For pleasures and privileges that go beyond provision.
31. For the ability to give generously.
32. For wisdom in making decisions and counseling others.
33. For right emotions.
34. For the ability to overcome or endure physical and emotional pain.
35. For the ability to help those we love.
36. For the ability to use our words for edification not destruction.
37. For the blessings of a good government.
38. For protection against the devil and his army.
39. For religious freedoms.
40. For victory over worldliness.

3. By declaring God's sovereignty and empathy in all things.

God knows and is mighty!

“Sovereignty”

We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is "The Governor among the nations" (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the "Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible. (Arthur Pink – *The Sovereignty of God*)

God cares!

“Empathy”

The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another. (Webster)

Romans 8:26-28

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. (28) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Note the question and answer of the 100th Westminster Shorter catechism:

Question 100: What doth the preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?

Answer: The preface of the Lord's Prayer, which is, *Our Father which art in heaven*, teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.

God is a prayer-hearing God—this lies deep in the very character of His nature. He is able and ready to help us:

Deut. 4:7

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?

Psalms 65:2

O you who hears prayer, to you shall all flesh come.

No other god is like our God. He hears our prayers. Everything else in this world that we put up as an idol or object of our affection will ultimately fail us. Only God is the all-sufficient one who answers our prayers with complete sovereignty and empathy.

Notice what Jesus says about the gracious Giving Father:

Luke 11:10-13

For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [11] What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; [12] or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? [13] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Charles Spurgeon on wrestling in prayer by declaring God's empathy:

"When I was racked some months ago with pain, to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room, and leave me alone; and then I had nothing I could say to God but this, 'Thou art my Father, and I am thy child; and thou, as a Father art tender and full of mercy. I could not bear to see my child suffer as thou makest me suffer, and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him. Wilt thou hide thy face from me, my Father? Wilt thou still lay on a heavy hand, and not give me a smile from thy countenance?' ... So I pleaded, and I ventured to say, when I was quiet, and they came back who watched me: 'I shall never have such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer.' I bless God that ease came and the racking pain never returned"

A Look at What Jesus Taught on Prayer

"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. (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. (9) Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (10) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us this day our daily bread, (12) and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (14) For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, (15) but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:5-15)

(The first 3 points are taken from Dave VanAcker's chapter "Dependent on and Trusting in God")

1. WE ARE TO PRAY

It is Assumed

When you prayer...

It is Commanded

Luke 18:1

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

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Pray without ceasing.

It is Practiced by the Godly

Psalm 32:6

Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

Daniel 6:10

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Luke 6:12

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

Acts 1:14

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Acts 2:41-42

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

2. WE ARE COMMANDED TO PRAY TO GOD AND FOR GOD

Matthew 6:5-6

"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.

We are to Pray to God

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.

It is very easy to pray with fancy words to impress other people or God.

Lyndon Johnson and Cliff Barrows – "I am sorry, but I wasn't talking to you."

We are to Pray for God and His Glory

The hypocrites... they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others...

Jesus told us to pray this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (10) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Daniel 9:17-19

Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. (18) O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. (19) O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

James 4:3

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

3. GOD ALREADY KNOWS WHAT WE WANT, THINK AND NEED

Matthew 6:7-8

(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.

Psalms 38:9

O Lord, all my longing is before you; my sighing is not hidden from you.

Psalms 69:19

You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you.

Psalms 139:2-4

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. (3) You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. (4) Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

Isaiah 65:24

Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.

Jonathan Edwards on why we should pray even though God knows are needs already:

It is not in order that God may be informed of our wants or desires. He is omniscient, and with respect to his knowledge, unchangeable. God never gains any knowledge by information. He knows what we want a thousand times more perfectly than we do ourselves, before we ask him. For though, speaking after the manner of men, God is sometimes represented as if he were moved and persuaded by the prayers of his people. Yet it is not to be thought that God is properly moved or made willing by our prayers. For it is no more possible that there should be any new inclination or will in God than new knowledge. The mercy of God is not moved or drawn by anything in the creature. But the spring of God's beneficence is within himself only. He is self-moved, and whatsoever mercy he bestows, the reason and ground of it is not to be sought for in the creature, but in God's own good pleasure. It is the will of God to bestow mercy in this way, viz. in answer to prayer, when he designs beforehand to bestow mercy, yea, when he has promised it, as Eze. 36:35, 37, "I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it. Thus saith the Lord, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." God has been pleased to constitute prayer, to be antecedent to the bestowment of mercy. And he is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayer, as though he were prevailed on by

prayer. — When the people of God are stirred up to prayer, it is the effect of his intention to show mercy. Therefore, he pours out the spirit of grace and supplication. (“The Most High: A Prayer-Hearing God”)

4. WE ARE TO PRAY KNOWING GOD PROMISES TO ANSWER PRAYER

Charles Spurgeon Expectancy in Prayer:

Spurgeon truly expected to see God answer prayer, both in the individual life and in the life of the church. He recognized unanswered prayer beyond human understanding, but he also experienced numerous instances in which God moved in response to his cry. He knew that God's power was manifested in the services in proportion as God's people truly prayed, and that in such proportion also souls were brought under conviction and drawn to Christ. (Dalimore, 48)

Matthew 7:7-11

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (9) Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? (11) If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

James 4:2

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

1 John 5:14-15

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.

James 5:16-18

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.

G. Cambell Morgan, a 19th Century British pastor sarcastically points out the power of prayer in the testimony of church history over its modern refutation:

When science makes experience the universal test of reality how can men rationally exclude the experience of the saints of all ages in this matter? They tell us they have asked and had; sought and found; knocked and the door has been opened. In answer to this it is affirmed that they were all perfectly sincere in believing so, but they were mistaken. Such a statement is a test of patience to which I am not equal. To be told that not one or two; but hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of human beings, not of one age or temperament or geographical position; but in every age, of all temperaments and from every clime, though weeks and months and years and decades and centuries and millenniums, have all been deceived, is to be asked to believe something far more incredible than anything which Christianity affirms as true. If the testimony of seers,

prophets, psalmists, saints, confessors and martyrs is all to go for nothing; yet may God help me to share this delusion, for it has been a glorious delusion and the dynamic by which all the best work of the centuries has been done (*The Practice of Prayer*, 25).

Prayer is simply talking to God but prayer is primarily about expressing our dependence on God by declaring God's **sovereignty** and **empathy** in all things.