

DOCTRINE MATTERS: ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Message 13: Prayer in Light of Providence

Definition of Prayer: *personal communication with God*

Effective prayer is made possible by our mediator, Jesus Christ:

1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)

*For there is one God, and there is **one mediator** between God and men, the man **Christ Jesus**,...*

Jesus said:

John 14:13-14 (ESV)

*Whatever you ask **in my name**, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything **in my name**, I will do it.*

John 15:16 (ESV)

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father **in my name**, he may give it to you.*

God is sovereign (providential).

Isaiah 46:9-11 (ESV)

...for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me,¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'¹¹ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

Ephesians. 1:11-12 (ESV)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Psalms 115:3 (ESV)

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Psalms: 135:6 (ESV)

Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

Daniel 4:35 (ESV)

All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

Proverbs 19:21 (ESV)

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

God's providence/sovereignty includes:

Providence as Preservation: The Triune God's ever-active work through God the Son in maintaining the things He created with all the characteristics and dynamics he gave them.

Providence as Concurrence: God's operation with created things, causing them (whether acting directly or ordaining them through secondary causes), through their properties, to act.

Caution: God's sovereignty does NOT mean...

Determinism: God has determined every single event. At each moment there is only one possible future: the future God has determined.

or..

Fatalism: Our choices don't affect the future.

The Early Church understood God's sovereignty and their responsibility to pray well, which is why they prayed fervently. Consider a few examples:

Acts 1:14 (ESV)

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer,...

Acts 6:4 (ESV)

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

Acts 10:9 (ESV)

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

Acts 12:5 (ESV)

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Acts 13:3 (ESV)

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 14:23 (ESV)

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 16:25 (ESV)

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,...

Acts 20:36 (ESV)

And when he [Paul] had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Acts 28:8 (ESV)

It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him.

Acts 4:24 (ESV)

They lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them..."

Acts 4:28 (ESV)

They acknowledge Sovereign God does "whatever His hand predestines to take place."

The result of their prayer...

Acts 4:31 (ESV)

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

KEY POINT: The Early Church prayed fervently to a Sovereign God who responded to their prayers!

KEY POINT: We pray to God _____ He is Sovereign

The Bible clearly affirms God's sovereignty, yet the Bible also affirms human's responsibility. In the realm of prayer, for example, we read:

James 5:16 (ESV)

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.

James 4:2 (ESV)

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.

Matthew 7:7-8 (ESV)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Romans 10:1 (ESV)

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

The tension between God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility displayed:

Philippians 2:12-13 (ESV)

...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (we are responsible), for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (God is Sovereign).

Why Pray? 4 Key Reasons:

1. God has _____ us to pray.

Jesus said:

Matthew 5:44 (ESV)

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,..

Matthew 6:9 (ESV)

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...(Lord's Prayer)

The Apostle Paul said:

...to the Thessalonians: *"pray without ceasing"* -**1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)**

...to the Philippians: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."* -**Philippians 4:6 (ESV)**

...to the Colossians: *"devote yourselves to prayer"* -**Colossians 4:2 (ESV)**

...to the Ephesians: *"and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying 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, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,"* -**Ephesians 6:18-19 (ESV)**

...to Timothy: *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,"* -**1 Timothy 2:1 (ESV)**

Peter said:

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." - **1 Peter 5:6-7 (ESV)**

2. _____ modeled a life of prayer

Luke 5:16 (ESV) tells us Jesus *"withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed."*

Mark 1:35 (ESV)

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Matthew 14:23 (ESV)

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

Luke 11:1 (ESV)

"Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples"

If we examine Jesus' prayer life, we will see (among other things) that:

- Jesus prayed many would believe and be made complete (**John 17:1-26**).
- Jesus prayed before choosing the disciples (**Luke 6:12**).
- Jesus prayed for others (**Luke 22:31-32**).
- Jesus even prayed for himself in the Garden of Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:39**)

KEY POINT: Before or after every major event, Jesus _____.

Prayer isn't just a New Testament idea. Followers of God have modeled prayer since the beginning of creation. Consider some Old Testament examples:

- **Abraham** prayed for a city (**Genesis 18:20-33**).
- **Moses** prayed for God's people (**Exodus 32:11-13**).
- **Joshua** prayed for guidance (**Joshua 7:1-26**).
- **Hannah** prayed for a child (**1 Samuel 1:1-20**).
- **Solomon** prayed for wisdom (**1 Kings 3:1-15**).
- The **prophets of God** prayed (e.g., **1 Kings 18:36-39; Jeremiah 20:7-18**).

3. God actually does _____ to prayer

James 4:2 (ESV)

You do not have, because you do not ask.

James 5:16 (ESV)

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV)

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

Psalms 55:22 (ESV)

Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you;

Psalms 40:1 (ESV)

"I waited patiently for the Lord; he heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit."

Luke 11:9-13

⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ 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!"

- We pray because God _____ diligence in prayer by _____ requests. **(Luke 11:5-10)**
- We pray because God _____ in _____ good gifts to His children. **(Luke 11:11-13)**

Prayer of Jabez

1 Chronicles 4:10 (ESV)

Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!" In response, "God granted what he asked."

2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

1 John 1:9 (ESV)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Wayne Grudem said, "If we were really convinced that prayer changes the way God acts, and that God does bring about remarkable changes in the world in response to prayer...then we would pray much more than we do."

4. God has ordained prayer as a _____ by which he accomplishes his eternal purposes

Matthew 9:37-38 (ESV)

Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

In **Eph. 1:11**, the "all things" which God works "according to the counsel of His will" includes the means that He uses to bring about His ultimate ends.

Examples from Scripture indicating God has ordained prayer as a means to accomplish His plans:

The Lord Rebukes Jobs friends in **Job 42:7-9 (ESV)**:

*⁷ After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. **And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly.** For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the Lord had told them, **and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.***

Jeremiah 29:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

“We must never presume God will grant us apart from prayer what he has ordained to grant us only by means of prayer. To say we don’t need to pray because God has determined all outcomes is as ridiculous as saying we don’t need to take medicine, work for a living, or look for a spouse because God has determined all outcomes. It is true God has determined all outcomes, but God has also determined the means by which those outcomes will take place.” - Sam Storms

“When God is about to do a mighty new thing He always sets His people praying.” -Jonathan Edwards

Some Practical Tips for Praying Effectively:

1. We must Pray According to _____.

1 John 5:14-15 (ESV)

*“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything **according to his will** he hears us. 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.”*

Matthew 6:10 (ESV)

*Your kingdom come, **your will be done**, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Matthew: 26:39 (ESV)

*“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as **you will**.”*

John 15:7 (ESV)

*Jesus said, “If you abide in me, and **my words** abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

“The basic purpose of prayer is not to bend God’s will to mine, but to mold my will into his... God will either give you what you ask for, or He will give you would have asked for, had you seen things from His perspective.” - Tim Keller

“I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me.” - Hudson Taylor

Do your prayers line up with God’s revealed will?

2. We must Pray with _____.

James 1:5-8 (ESV)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Mark 11:24 (ESV)

Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Matthew 21:22 (ESV)

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.

Romans 4:21 (ESV)

Faith means we are “fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Faithless prayers are nothing more than “vain repetitions” (Matthew 6:7)

When you pray, do you recite vain repetitions, or do you model faith?

3. We must be _____.

1 John 3:21-22 (ESV)

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

Psalms 66:18 (ESV)

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

Proverbs 15:8 (ESV)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

Proverbs 15:29 (ESV)

The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

Proverbs 28:9 (ESV)

If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

1 Peter 3:12 (ESV)

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

1 Peter 3:7 (ESV)

*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way...and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, **so that your prayers may not be hindered.***

Are you living in obedience to God?

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey my commands.”

4. We must _____ .

Matthew 6:12 (ESV)

...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

1 John 1:9 (ESV):

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Psalms 19:12 (ESV)

...Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

James 5:16 (ESV)

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.

Isaiah 59:1-2 (ESV)

Indeed, the Lord’s hand is not too short to save, and His ear is not too deaf to hear. But your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God, and your sins have made Him hide His face from you so that He does not listen.

This is why we should all be seeking, searching, and praying:

Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

What sins in your life do you need to confess and repent of so that your prayers aren't hindered?

5. We must _____ others.

Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Mark 11:25 (ESV)

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Who do you need to forgive so that your prayers are not hindered?

6. We must remain _____.

James 4:6 (ESV)

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

James 4:10 (ESV)

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Micah 6:8 (ESV)

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to **walk humbly** with your God?*

Luke 18:11-14 (ESV)

The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up 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, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

When you go before God in prayer, do you have a humble and dependent spirit...or do you go before God as if He owes you something?

Other keys to effective prayer:

- **Fasting:** Joel 2:12-13; Matthew 6:16; Matthew 9:15; Acts 13:3; Acts 14:23;
- **Persistence in prayer:** Gen. 32:26; 1 Thess. 5:17; Col. 4:2; Acts 6:4
- **Waiting on the Lord:** Psalm 27:14; 38:15; 130:5-6
- **Praying in private:** Dan. 6:10; Matt. 6:5-6; Acts 12:5; Acts 12:12-16
- **Praying with others:** Matt. 18:19-20; Acts 4:24; Matt. 6:11-13

Three ways God responds to prayer:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.

Reasons some prayers seem to remain unanswered:

1) We have to wait on God's _____.

Galatians 4:4 (ESV)

*But when the **fullness of time had come**, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,...*

Revelation 6:10-11 (ESV)

*They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and **told to rest a little longer**, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers[a] should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

2) We don't always pray as we _____. (Romans 8:26)

3) We don't always pray according to _____. (James 4:3)

4) We don't always pray in _____. (James 1:6-8)