

7/16/23 Christ Fellowship

“The Right Way To Pray” – Matthew 6:9-13

Several years ago, I was on my way to Walmart in Decatur and I got a phone call from Wise County Jail. When I answered, the man on the other end told me his name and said he had just gotten out of jail just now and he really needed a ride. He asked me if there was any way I could come pick him up. I told him that he had called at just the right time as I just happened to be in the neighborhood and I would be right there. I turned around and pulled in the parking lot and saw him. He got in and I asked, “So...where are we headed?” He said, “Albuquerque.” And he wasn’t kidding. Poor guy had gotten busted passing through Texas and his truck was impounded and gone and he needed to get home to Albuquerque. It was at this moment I started to regret taking the phone call. But it got worse. I started calling around trying to find a bus depot somewhere. I wasn’t having any luck so I went by the Harvest Baptist Association office and talked to the secretary there and she looked it up on the computer and it showed the nearest bus depot was in Denton. Well, I couldn’t just kick the guy out of my car so I drove to Denton only to find out that it was not a bus station but just some kind of bus stop that picked up and dropped off every few days and that was not one of the days. So, I couldn’t leave him there. I made some more calls and internet searches and it showed that there was a bus station in Wichita Falls. I didn’t want to drive to Wichita Falls but I didn’t know what to do and I was getting pretty desperate, so I just went. Drove all the way to Wichita Falls only to discover that it, too, was only a bus stop and no bus was going to stop there today. It was basically just a bench in the parking lot of a convenience store is all it was. So, I started doing what I should have been doing from the start. I started praying. I mean praying. Out loud, fervently asking God for wisdom and help and patience. We sat there for a little while, both praying, and an 18-wheeler pulled up on a side street right in front of us and the driver got out to go into the convenience store. As he passed by the car, I rolled down the window and asked him, “Hey, which way are you headed?” The man said, “California.” I said, “Are you going through New Mexico, anywhere near Albuquerque?” He said he was going right through there. “Do you mind giving him a ride to Albuquerque?” I pointed to my surprised-looking friend in the passenger seat. “Sure. Hop in.” I got a call the next day from my friend who said the trucker was a great guy and literally dropped him off at his front door. Thank you, Lord! I was glad to be able to help the guy but I was very glad for the trucker to help the guy as well. We were both in trouble there for a while. Makes you wonder if angels ever drive 18-wheelers, know what I mean?

How about you? Who do you call when you are in trouble or in need? Or maybe you don’t call anybody. You just always try to fix it yourself. Or maybe you try to forget you are even in trouble. Maybe you distract yourself with work or hobbies or even drugs or alcohol. How’s that working out for you? Is that getting you out of trouble? I think we all know in our minds that when we are in trouble, we should take our requests to God in prayer. We know we should but...we don’t. We know that our heavenly Father is the one to call on and we know He has the wisdom and power to help us but for some reason we hesitate to do it. We know those requests should be made with confidence because He tells us to come boldly into His throne room in **Hebrews 4:16**. We know we should and yet we don’t for any number of reasons but let me suggest to you this morning that one reason we hesitate to pray is because we don’t really know how. Oh, sure, we have some knowledge of prayer and I’m not saying we are doing it wrong, necessarily, but maybe we aren’t really doing it right. I think we will find as we study prayer more deeply that God’s ultimate purpose for prayer is not so you have a number to call when you need something but the ultimate purpose of prayer is for God’s glory. **Psalms 50:15** says, “*Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*” When everything you say in your prayers is backed up with the mindset that you want to glorify God, the more powerful your prayer life will be.

Have you ever been in a so-called conversation with somebody and you realize that they are only partly paying attention? Does it seem like they are really only participating when they are talking? What’s worse is when that person only wants to talk about themselves and when you try to steer the conversation elsewhere they always bring it back to them. Well, I have heard enough people pray in my life to know that must be how God feels sometimes.

So, do you ever feel like your prayer life is weak and ineffective? If it feels that way, then it is weak and ineffective and it is weak and ineffective because your walk with God is weak and ineffective. Your conversation with Him can only be as powerful as your relationship with Him and your relationship grows stronger as you learn to trust Him and obey Him.

Do you remember that old hymn, "Trust and Obey"? It says in one of the verses: Then in fellowship sweet We will sit at His feet Or we'll walk by His side in the way What He says we will do Where He sends we will go Never fear, only trust and obey

Oh, that's good stuff! Do you want that fellowship with Him? Do you want your prayers to be powerful and effective? **James 5:16** says, *"The fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* Well, to be righteous means to be right with God. So, you can either be perfect or be forgiven and obedient. I'll have to be the latter. But because I am right with God through His Son Jesus and I have been forgiven and when I am trusting and obeying Him, I can expect my prayer life to be powerful and effective. But there is a good way to pray and there is a better way to pray. Did you know that? The good way to pray is, *"Aaaahhh!!! Lord, please help me!"* Sometimes that's all we have time for or all we are able to do and that works. God hears that prayer. But there is a better way to pray and Jesus told us as He told His disciples who asked Him about it in **Matthew chapter 6:9-13**. The Lord's Prayer is found there and is a skeleton upon which we will fill in and flesh out what our fervent prayers should look like.

The Lord's Prayer was never intended to be repeated as a prayer itself. The disciples didn't ask Jesus to teach them "a prayer" but to teach them how to pray and so Jesus gave them this outline. So, first turn to **Matthew 6:9-13** and then we will look at **Psalms 100** in a few minutes. Jesus said, *"This, then, is how you should pray:*

*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 today 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 the evil one."*

In a seminary missions class, Herbert Jackson told how, as a new missionary, he was assigned a car that would not start without a push. After pondering his problem, he devised a plan. He would either park on a hill or leave the engine running. He used this ingenious procedure for two years. Ill health forced the Jackson family to leave, and a new missionary came to that station. When Jackson proudly began to explain his arrangement for getting the car started, the new man began looking under the hood. Before the explanation was complete, the new missionary interrupted, *"Why, Dr. Jackson, I believe the only trouble is this loose cable."* He gave the cable a twist, stepped into the car, pushed the switch, and to Jackson's astonishment, the engine roared to life. For two years needless trouble had become routine. The power was there all the time. Only a loose connection kept Jackson from putting that power to work.

J.B. Phillips paraphrases **Ephesians 1:19-20**, *"How tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God."* When we make firm our connection with God, his life and power flow through us. (Ernest B. Beevers) There is great power in prayer but we have to do it correctly. There is a method to it and when used correctly, it is the single most powerful weapon on the planet because it is the power of Almighty God, the power of the Creator of the universe and the risen Savior of the world. Here in Matthew, Jesus gives us the outline for using prayer and it can be broken down into five steps. The first verse is about praise. **Verse 10** asks for God's purpose. **Verse 11** is asking for God's provision. **Verse 12** is

asking for forgiveness or pardon and **verse 13** is asking for protection. Today, we are going to look at just the first step to real and powerful prayer. If you want your prayer to be heard and for it to be effective, Jesus says to start out with praise to God. That's what Jesus was doing when He said, *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."* He is acknowledging that our Father is God and makes His home in Heaven because He is the Creator. He is our Father, which means He is our Supplier, Redeemer and Sustainer.

"Hallowed" is another word for holy and it means set apart and so we only use His name when we are talking to Him or about Him. I just need to say again that ANY use of ANY name or title of God outside of that is to use His name in vain. When we say "OMG" or any other name or title of God or Jesus, whether it is a word used in surprise or anger or shock, it is a sin. It is supremely disrespectful of Almighty God and will be punished as such. I know you don't mean anything by it. That's the point! It is not to be used for nothing. There is power in those names and they are to be used reverently and in praise. So, what does true praise sound like or look like? Well, I invite you to turn way left in your Bibles to the middle of the book; to the book of Psalms, specifically **Psalm 100**.

Do you appreciate what God does for you? Do you enjoy being with Him and witnessing His glory and power? Then just tell Him. Expressing our love for God in praise doesn't just tell God, it actually completes the enjoyment and appreciation. Expressing praise is part of the enjoyment. If you went to a football game and only clapped quietly when your team scored, that wouldn't be much fun, would it? If all you did was say, "Amen, brother" quietly at a first down, that game wouldn't be nearly as enjoyable. We don't know who wrote **Psalm 100**, but he obviously can't contain his praise. Just look at the very first word.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

2 *Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

3 *Know that the Lord is God.*

*It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

4 *Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.*

5 *For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

I want us all to read it again out loud. I don't care what translation you have and I hope you see that the psalmist is praising God just because of Who God is and what He has done and not because of who the psalmist is or what the psalmist has done. Read it like you mean it. (Repeat)

Do you see how he praises God just for who God is and what He has done? This first part is not about you. If you have a hard time thanking God for who He is, then you don't know who He is. In whatever circumstance you are in, you should SHOUT your praise to God for His goodness, mercy, grace, love and forgiveness. Without all of that, whatever you are going through would be immeasurably worse. You shout for a football game that means absolutely nothing. You should want to shout for all that God has done, is doing and will do in your life.

Now, I know that this psalm is not a prayer. It's actually a song but it involves the kind of praise that we should incorporate into our prayers. Look at **verse 2**. *"Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs."* Now, obviously, this is talking about praising God when you are in a good mood, right? When all is well, worship with gladness. Praise God with joyful songs when you are happy. Right? Actually, this makes no such qualifications. Every time we seriously pray, we should realize who God is and who we are and that should bring us joy

to the point where we can pray with gladness and joy because we are talking to the Creator of the universe and Almighty God. When we do that, we will start to see power in our prayer life just like Paul and Silas did in **Acts 16**. In Acts 16, it tells of Paul and Silas being thrown into jail for no good reason. Not only were they thrown in jail, but they were whipped and put into stocks that would keep them from moving or finding any comfort. How would you feel about that if it were you? I have to admit, I'm afraid I would be seething mad. I didn't do anything wrong. I'm in pain. My rights have been taken away. Most people would be miserable and mad. But in beautiful **verse 25**, it says that Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening to them.

I don't know what they were praying or singing but there is power in that kind of joyful, praising, worshipful prayer. In the next verse it says that there was suddenly a violent earthquake and the foundations of the prison were shaken and the doors flew open and the chains were loosed. Talk about "Chainbreaker"! Tell me there's not power in prayer. Tell me again how you have it so bad you can't pray. Paul later went on to say, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13I can do all this through him who gives me strength."* Philippians 4

You ought to SHOUT that to God in prayer! *"Thank you, Lord, for what you are doing in my life and while I may not be comfortable, I know that because of my relationship with you that I can do all things through You who gives me strength!"* And maybe that means that God will remove you or release you from your trouble like He did with Paul and Silas that time or...maybe He just gives you the grace and strength to get through it, praising Him because you know that the other prisoners are listening to you.

Because they are listening. Other people hear your prayers and they want to know what kind of God you worship. Do you worship a God that you only pray to asking for help and protection as you cry out in pain or do you, in the midst of pain, shout to God your praise just because of who He is and what He has done in spite of who you are and in spite of what you have done? That's a powerful way to start your prayer right there.

We all remember the story of Daniel in the lions' den but do you remember what got him there? He was caught praying and giving thanks to God. What did Daniel have to praise God for? He was in captivity in a foreign country, his country had been conquered with its capital city of Jerusalem in ruins and yet Daniel risked everything to praise God. He must have been convinced of the power of prayer and especially the power of praise in prayer.

Or how about good old Job? One day Job was the richest man in the world, blessed by God with everything he could want including seven sons and three daughters and the next day he lost everything including all his children and what did Job do? It says as soon as Job got the word, he got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."* (Job 1:20-21) Evidently Job, too, knew about the power of praise in prayer. There must be power in praise. Why else would Jesus tell His disciples to pray starting with praise?

Let's spend some time right now just praising God for who He is and what He has done. Remember, this is not about you. Praise God for His power and sovereignty. Praise Him for His creativity. Praise Him just for being who He is and even though you don't understand Him, you will trust Him and obey Him because He is God. Do that right now, as the music plays.

If you don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus then all you have to do is believe that Jesus is the only way to Heaven and by His sacrifice on the cross, all your sins can and will be forgiven if you just ask. Repent – turn away – from those sins and ask God to be Lord of every aspect of your life and open up the power of prayer in your life today. Do it now. Today is the day of salvation! Thank you, Lord!