

Gospel Study 5 | Prayer

Who you call when you're excited or when you're in need tells you a lot about the nature of that relationship. From the very beginning of Genesis, the people of God have been known as those who "call upon the name of the LORD." The pattern of the world is to call upon anything but the LORD, but the pattern of the Christian is to pray. But for so many Christians, prayer is one of the most difficult things to do. It's hard to pray. But why? What are some of the factors that make prayer hard for us?

In this gospel study we are going to look at what prayer really is and how the gospel moves us to pray with more faith, consistency and joy. Let's start with a definition of prayer.

Read 1 Samuel 1:12-16. How does Hannah describe prayer at the end of verses 15 & 16? What does that teach us about prayer? So, we could define prayer this way ...

Prayer is: "Pouring out one's soul to God."

Prayer is taking what's inside (both our burdens and joys) and instead of holding them in, pouring them out. But why should we talk to God about what's going on inside our hearts? How do we know God really listens? Or even cares for that matter? This is where Jesus and the truth of the gospel come to our rescue.

Read Matthew 6:9. When Jesus taught us to pray, he said, "Pray like this ... 'Our Father in Heaven' ..." Jesus teaches us that to even begin to pray, we need to grasp the truth that God is our Father. Now many people, even in Jesus' day, surely did not get along with their earthly fathers. Some probably didn't even know their earthly father. But Jesus brings in this picture of God as our Father because He wants us to know that the reason we instinctively know what an imperfect father looks like on earth, is because there's a perfect Father who lives in heaven. But how do I know that God is my Father?

Read John 1:12. We see here that we need to become a child of God by receiving Jesus Christ. This means that if we have received Christ then we have freedom and access to God in prayer as our Father (see also Rom.8:15-16; Gal.4:6-7; Eph. 2:18).

This was the secret to Jesus' prayer life. His daily communion, intimacy, and dependence on his Father. And this is what the Spirit of God is restoring in every believer's life ... a life of praying as a child of God. This is what it means to 'pray in the Spirit.' It's praying with the boldness and freedom as a child of God.

Read Luke 23:44-46. In his darkest hour, who did Jesus call upon? Who could he depend on? What did he do? Jesus bent his heart towards his Father in prayer.

And so we see that prayer is pouring out our burdens and joys to our Father in heaven who cares.

Two great questions to ask then are:

| TWO QUESTIONS IN PRAYER

First, "What is causing me to sigh?"

Anxiety happens when we pridefully take our sighs and try to hide them away, but burying our burdens is like putting a lighted stick of dynamite under the ground, it doesn't matter that it's hidden because eventually it's going to do damage. However, we begin to experience peace when we humbly take our sighs and instead of putting them away somewhere, we immediately pour them out to someone, namely to God *with thanksgiving* in who He is for us in Jesus (see Phil.4:4-7; Col. 4:2).

Second, "What is causing me to smile?"

Pride can quickly take root when we believe that the joys and gifts of life are our due - that somehow God owes us this or we earned 'this' all by ourselves. But true joy is always expressed in pouring out our praise to God with an understanding of His grace. It's acknowledging that every good and perfect gift is from our Father above (see James 1:17). This "pouring out" of our problems and praises happens in one of two ways.

| TWO KINDS OF PRAYER

First, there is concentrated prayer:

This is what the Bible calls "supplication." If prayer is entering into the throne room of God, concentrated prayer is closing the door behind you. You're there to do business with God or to spend intimate quality time with Him, and you can't do that without first having a spirit of thanksgiving.

Second, there is casual prayer:

This is what the Bible calls "all prayer" or "praying at all times." This is the daily posture of a Christian. It's approaching life moment by moment in an attitude of honesty and humility before God. It's the heart of living dependent upon God.

So, imagine a healthy prayer life as any healthy relationship. Relationships needs time - both concentrated time and casual time. Imagine a husband and wife who look forward to a sit-down dinner but also engage in casual conversation throughout the day. If it's always just dinner, then the relationship becomes too formal and rigid, but if it's always just casual passing conversation, then the relationship becomes too impersonal. It must be both and so it is with prayer.

Prayer is all about relationship and fellowship. Because of receiving what Christ has done in our place, we have been permanently adopted into the family of God (see John 8:34-36). So our relationship to God is forever as children to their Father, but we build intimate fellowship upon this relationship by pouring out our burdens and joys to Him in confession and faith through the practice of prayer.