

Understanding Prayer

1. Introduction

- a. If the first and lowest operation of pain shatters the illusion that all is well, the second shatters the illusion that what we have, whether good or bad in itself, is our own and enough for us. Everyone has noticed how hard it is to turn our thoughts to God when everything is going well with us. We 'have all we want' is a terrible saying when 'all' does not include God. We find God an interruption. As St Augustine says somewhere, 'God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full—there's nowhere for Him to put it.' Or as a friend of mine said, 'We regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it's there for emergencies but he hopes he'll never have to use it.' Now God, who has made us, knows what we are and that our happiness lies in Him. Yet we will not seek it in Him as long as he leaves us any other resort where it can even plausibly be looked for. While what we call 'our own life' remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our interests but make 'our own life' less agreeable to us, and take away the plausible source of false happiness?
 - i. From The Problem of Pain
 - ii. Compiled in A Year with C.S. Lewis
- b. Coronavirus, Social Justice... Lives go back to normal(ish). Our prayers wane.
 - i. Not preaching from a place of confidence today...

2. Understanding Prayer through the Book of Acts

- a. The earliest disciples knew that they were desperate for prayer, tasked with an impossible command. **[ACTS 1]**
- b. The NT church was birthed after a period of waiting on God in corporate prayer for days on end. **[ACTS 1]**
- c. The NT church was devoted to prayer on every level (personal, corporate, leaders). **[ACTS 2, 3, 4, 6, 8,]**
 - i. 3rd, 6th, 9th hour
 - ii. Praying in the temple, Solomon's colonnade, in homes, on the streets
 - iii. Praying for boldness, for release from prison, for leaders, for healing
- d. Persecution brought the NT church to new levels of God-reliance, prayer, and boldness. **[ACTS 4]**
- e. God guided the NT leaders during prayer meetings **[ACTS 9, 10, 13, 14, 20, 21]**
- f. Prayer was an evangelical tool in the NT church
 - i. Prayers for healing **[ACTS 9]**
 - ii. Prayers for exorcism
 - iii. People open to prayer often became the beginning of the first churches **[ACTS 16]**
- g. The NT church realized that prayer was their greatest weapon in an ancient spiritual war.
 - i. Paul and Silas in prison **[ACTS 16]**

- h. The NT church wasn't perfect but they entrusted God's most precious possession (his people) to himself by prayer! [ACTS 14, 20, 21]
 - i. The NT church didn't have the Scriptures readily accessible like we do. The NT church didn't have the internet, apps, TV, radio like we do. The NT didn't have missiologists and seminary professors who knew the best way to do church, make disciples, or sustain healthy movements. Do you know what they had? They had prayer. They had the Spirit. They had the Word in their hearts when it couldn't be in their hands.
 - i. Were they perfect? Absolutely not.
 - ii. Was the early church a hot mess? You bet it was.
 - iii. But right now we have a sailboat with no wind. And I am weary of it.
 - j. Church, when are we going to start praying like our lives depended on it?
 - i. When are we going to start praying like we actually believe hell is real?
 - ii. When are we going to start praying like the eternal state of over a billion Unreached People who have never even HEARD the name of Christ depended on our obedient prayer?
3. A Call to Repent
- a. I don't have strong words of "be like me" in this area. What I do have are four areas of personal repentance for me as it relates to prayer, and I am assuming many of you can relate.
 - i. **We must repent of our prayerlessness.**
 - 1. To my own shame I tell you that there is, perhaps, no greater barometer of a person's spiritual vitality than their prayer life.
 - a. The same way you could say if a family only talks once a week their relationship probably is rough
 - 2. We lack corporate prayer
 - a. 1 Thess 5:17, Pray without ceasing = you's guys keep praying together (2nd person plural in greek)
 - 3. We lack perseverance
 - a. *Luke 18:1 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them*

speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

4. We lack praying at all

ii. We must repent of attempting to only do what is possible.

1. Deep down, I don't know if we believe God will actually act
2. Our level of expectation for God to truly intervene is low - so low that we expect God to answer only the prayers that we can almost fulfill ourselves
3. Most Christians do not believe that God answers mountain-moving prayers
4. EM Bounds (1835 to 1913) said, concerning prayer, *"The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men... The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men... men of prayer!"*
5. If we don't feel desperate for prayer, then we are trying to live the Christian life in our own power.
6. If we are trying to live the Christian life in our own power then we are either
 - a. Blindingly arrogant, thinking that we think we can do it <or>
 - b. We've adopted a cheap version of the call of Christ, dumbing it down to something we can, indeed, accomplish
7. If we aren't trying to accomplish the impossible, then we aren't trying to accomplish the Great Commission.
8. *Ephesians 3:20-21 says, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*
 - a. That is our God. Do we believe that? Do we pray like we believe it?

iii. We must repent of treating prayer as less than any other spiritual work.

1. If you are like me, you feel bad when someone asks you for help and you can't do anything, "Well, all I can do is pray, I guess."
2. Do I really think so little of prayer that "Well, I guess all I can do is pray," like it's a last resort?! I wish I had \$50 to give you but I guess I will have to settle for prayer.
3. Why are we so willing to sacrifice, to go, to do big things for Jesus but so resistant to praying?
4. Friends, prayer is work, and it's hard work. It is warfare. I don't know if there is harder spiritual work out there than prayer.

iv. We must repent of treating prayer as either personal or corporate instead of both/and.

1. In a Barna poll from 2017, they found, rounding:

- a. 82% of people only pray by themselves, silently
 - b. 13% pray by themselves out loud
 - c. 2% pray out loud with another human being
 - d. Only 2% of Christians pray with their church
2. Some of you get the heeby jeebys praying with people
 3. Others (like myself) have the brain of a squirrel and we focus better when we are praying WITH other people (like my bride)
 4. But it shouldn't be praying by yourself or praying with - we need to be devoted to both
 - a. In your prayer closet... in your family... with your Discipleship Group... your friends... with Revolve

4. Challenge:

- a. Every person this week please commit to dedicating one hour to prayer in addition to your existing times with the Lord.
 - i. Consider the prayer wheel if you don't know where to begin.
 - ii. If you have a system that works for you, run with it
- b. I want everyone to think about and take action on how they could multiply prayer in their life.
 - i. Doesn't necessarily mean waking up at 4am to pray (might be, tho)
 - ii. Committing to pray while jogging for Revolve.
 - iii. Committing to pray while showering for your family.
 - iv. Committing to pray for your neighbors each day when you walk the dog.
 - v. Committing to log on the prayer call at 10am one of the weekdays or 8:30am on Saturday

5. Table Talk:

- a. What struck you in this message that you didn't know before or had forgotten?
- b. What repentance point do you relate to the most?
- c. Practically, what is one way that you can multiply prayer in your life, and what is your plan to begin this week? [What? When? Where?]