

Jumpstarting Your Walk – Through Prayer – Luke 11:1

Scripture Reading: 1Thessalonians 5:12-22

Introduction

In my studies this week I came across a story that concerned the experience of Jay Kesler [**show picture**] who is the former president of Taylor University in Indiana

He was travelling on a plane back when the airlines still served meals on flights and, when lunch was served, he witnessed the young man next to him decline his tray and then proceed to sit with his head bowed; apparently in prayer

Kesler was impressed by the young man's devotion so he struck up a conversation with him after lunch wherein he remarked to the young man that it seemed that he must be a Christian because it appeared he was fasting and praying

The young man replied, "I am a Satan worshipper and the members of my church have agreed to fast every Friday at noon. During that time we pray that the leaders of the Christian world will fall. We pray that they will fall into sexual sin and that their family life would crumble."

Even though I guess I knew that there were people praying against Christianity it was still kind of surprising to read of a person actually openly doing it

And I think it bothered me in large part because it brought about a sense of conviction concerning my own prayer life

Actually, it seems most believers are dissatisfied or disappointed with their prayer life

We believe prayer is **wise**; we believe prayer is **beneficial**; we even believe prayer is **necessary**; and still we **struggle** to pray as we believe we should

I believe there are many reasons why we struggle with prayer but that our difficulty mainly centers on wrong understanding about prayer – what it is, how to do it, the reason for it, what to expect from it, and so on

Last week we looked at how we can jumpstart our Christian walk by spending time in, under, and with God's Word

And we saw how the Bible is God's special communication to us and how it's God's primary means of talking to us

I said that reading and reflecting on God's Word might well have more impact on our Christian walk than any other thing we could do

And that is especially true when we combine Bible reading, study, reflection, and application with prayer

It's difficult to separate the disciplines of Bible study and prayer because they are really two sides of the same coin

Each can be practiced apart from the other but they are meant to function together and their power is multiplied when they are practiced together

So this morning our focus is going to be on prayer and we will first look at **what prayer is**

Then we will take a look at some **prerequisites of prayer** and then some of the **blessings of prayer**

Let's begin by defining prayer – what prayer is

I. What Prayer Is

Communication – Talking to God

Prayer is simply **communication – mankind talking to God**

We all know there are different types of communication for different circumstances

Announcements, broadcasts, lectures, sermons, and many lessons are one-way affairs where information is given and received without any back-and-forth interaction

But other communication is a matter of give and take where each party speaks, listens, and responds to the other

And that's the kind of communication we have available to us with God

God has personhood and two-way communication, conversation, is possible with him

And prayer is half of that two-way communication

God speaks to us through his written Word, the Bible, and prayer is our means of speaking to him

So, the first thing we need to recognize is that –

Prayer is actual communication

One of the biggest interpersonal problems in any relationship is poor communication or even failure to communicate

I'm sure all of us could testify to a time when we meant to talk about something with someone but didn't

We likely thought about it long and hard and worked things out in our own minds but never actually got around to talking to the other person about it – and then we were surprised when they didn't know anything about the matter

Has that ever happened to you?

Or how about this one – have you ever typed an email and then forgot to hit "Send"?

Or found the envelope with the letter or the payment or whatever sealed and stamped but not actually mailed?

Intentions don't count in communication – you actually have to talk – you can't just think about talking to the other person

And the same is true with prayer

On occasion I have found myself thinking and working through a problem and even turning to Scripture for an answer but never actually talking to God about it –

And if anyone had asked me if I had consulted God about it I would have likely said "yes" but I hadn't actually ever prayed about it

Thinking isn't the same as praying – we actually need to address our words to God for prayer to occur

Now, that doesn't mean we need to verbalize our prayers out loud

God knows our hearts and he can hear us when we pray in our minds –

Nothing is hidden from him as we see in [Hebrews 4:13](#)

Look with me also at [1Samuel 1:12-16](#) and the example of Hannah praying for a son

*As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. **Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard.** Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman. And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."*

An audible voice isn't necessary in our private prayers but communication is – we must actually direct our words to God either audibly or in our minds or we haven't actually prayed

And that means we must believe certain things when it comes to prayer

First, we must believe that God is real and that he hears our prayers as we see in Hebrews 11:6

...without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

And **1John 5:14** tells us –

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

Because if we don't believe God is there and that he hears us; we're just talking to ourselves

So we have to believe that God is there and listening; then we must believe that God will answer our prayers as we see one more verse down in **1John 5:15** –

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.

But we have to understand that God may answer differently than we expect or want him to

- Sometimes God grants and even exceeds our request as we see in **Ephesians 3:20** where Paul says that God...
...is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...
- But sometimes God says “no” as he did when Jesus prayed in **Matthew 26** for the cup of the cross to be removed and again in **2Corinthians 12** when Paul prayed that God would remove his thorn in the flesh

Then in **James 4:3** we see that our motives for asking can lead God to say “no” because we are asking amiss

And when God says “no” we must accept that God in his wisdom has decided not to grant our requests and not assume that prayer doesn't work

- Then at other times God says “wait”

Remember how Jesus taught the parable of the persistent widow in **Luke 18:1-8** to show that God won't long delay but that he sometimes desires for us to continue to ask so that our faith will be strengthened

Remember that Jesus and Paul both continued to pray until they got a definitive answer from God and when the firm “no” came they both demonstrated their trust in the Father as they accepted his answer

And with all of God's answers we must trust in his providence and accept the answers we receive because God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours and we know that he wants what is best for his children

Next we want to look at some prerequisites that we must recognized when it comes to having our prayers answered

Some conditions that determine whether prayers are satisfactory to God

II. Prerequisites of Prayer

First, we need to understand the promise to hear and answer prayer is for believers only

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray the model prayer Jesus taught them began

“Our Father in heaven...” indicating that God the Father is actually the Father of the petitioner and this prayer is meant to be prayed by the disciples showing that the disciples should address God the Father as “Father”

And Scripture is clear in [John 1:12](#) that the true child of God is one who has believed in the Son

God is the Creator of all mankind but he is only the Father of those who have believed in the Son

Unbelievers cannot rightly say that God is their Father so God hasn't promised to hear and answer their prayers

This is a matter that will come up from time to time as you interact with the unsaved as they will challenge the efficacy of prayer and share how God didn't answer their prayers so we need to know how to address it

We know that God has, on occasion, heard and responded to the prayers of unbelievers such as Cornelius the Roman centurion so we cannot say that God absolutely doesn't hear or answer the prayers of unbelievers

He may well do so but he has not obligated himself to do so and we need to gently invite those who are unsaved to see the truth and accept the Son

Another prerequisite is the condition of our hearts – we must be leading an appropriate life

The first thing we need to understand is sin will hinder our prayers and keep God from hearing and answering them

Look with me at [Psalm 66:18](#) where the psalmist writes –

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

And [Proverbs 15:29](#) - *The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.*

In fact, willful sin causes our prayers to be repulsive to God – look with me at [Proverbs 28:9](#) –

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

And yet we know that none of us is without sin

So we must continually be striving toward righteousness as we see in [1John 3:7](#) –

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous.

And a little further down in [1John 3:21-22](#) we see that as we endeavor to keep the commandments of God we know that God will hear and answer our prayers

Then, we must have a proper frame of mind when we pray – we must have a right attitude

We must approach God with **reverence**

While God is our Father and we can approach him as Father, we must never forget that we are addressing Almighty God

In his model prayer to the disciples Jesus showed supreme respect to the Father as we see in [Matthew 6:9](#) where he first calls him “Father” and then called for his name to be “hallowed” or “revered”

We must also approach God with **confidence/ faith/trust** that he can and will do as he said he would

James makes that clear in [James 1:6-7](#) where he says that anyone who asks in a wishy-washy way should not expect to receive anything from God

So we must do as the author of Hebrews instructs in [Hebrews 4:16](#) and come before God with confidence so that we may receive – prayer is not a hail-Mary, shot in the dark, I hope it works out kind of endeavor

We must also pray with **sincerity and humility**

Consider the Lord's teaching in [Luke 18:9-14](#) and [Matthew 6:5-6](#) where pride and insincerity are contrasted with humility and contriteness

We must also have a spirit of **thankfulness** when we pray

As parents we try to instill a spirit of thankfulness in our children and teach them to say the magic words “please and thank you” because we know that people are more inclined to continue to do things for people who appreciate it

And God tells us in his Word repeatedly to be thankful people as he does in **Ephesians 5:20** and **Colossians 3:15** just to name a couple of instances

We’ve already seen how we need to pray with **right motives** from **James 4:3**

But we must also have **right relationships with others** as **Matthew 5:23-24** indicates

And **1Peter 3:7** tells us that even having a relationship with our spouse that is out of order will hinder our prayers

We must pray with perseverance as we already saw Jesus teach in **Luke 18** and as we see stated very plainly in **1Thessalonians 5:17** – *pray without ceasing*

Lastly, we must pray with the **proper authority** which means we must pray according to God’s will as we see Jesus pray in **Matthew 26:39** when he asked for what he wanted while remaining in submission to the will of his Father

And we are told to pray in in Jesus’ name in **John 14:13-14** which means to pray as Jesus would pray –with his intention and authority

Jesus always sought the glory of the Father and to do the Father’s will so if our prayers are truly uttered in his name they will seek the same outcome

And it’s here that prayer and God’s Word truly intersect as God reveals his will in his Word

Notice that this list doesn’t say anything about a proper posture for prayer or what words to use while praying

Howard Hendricks, **[show picture]** longtime professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, told of a young man who went to his first prayer meeting after coming to a saving knowledge of Christ

Everyone was getting up and voicing long prayers filled with flowery language when this new believer stood to take his turn and said,

“Lord, this is Mel. I’m not sure whether you remember me or not...I met you last Thursday night. I just wanted to say...well...thank you for changing my life.”

And he sat back down having prayed one of the most profound prayers of the evening

Prayer doesn’t need to be uttered in a cathedral-filling, stained glass voice using King James English to be effective

They certainly can be if that’s how you demonstrate respect for God – but they don’t need to be – God will understand whatever language you use

And God doesn’t care if you’re sitting, standing, kneeling, or lying down

He doesn’t care if your hands are folded, raised, hanging by your sides, or stuffed into your pockets

He doesn’t care if your eyes are open or closed, whether they are aimed heavenward or down at your feet

God only cares about the posture and language of your heart

Next we will look at some of the blessings that come from talking to God

III. The Blessings of Prayer

James 5:16 tells us – *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working*

Which means prayer is beneficial and we should expect things to come from praying

It seems almost too obvious to mention but we should certainly expect God to do what we ask

After all one of the reasons to pray is to make our requests known to God as **Philippians 4:6** tells us –

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

And **James 4:2** says – *You do not have because you do not ask*

So expecting to get what we've asked seems logical as long as are prayers are acceptable to God as we've just seen

Beyond that though, our prayers can bring us **peace of mind** as we see a little farther along in **Philippians 4:7** which says *...the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*

Oftentimes, that peace of mind is the result of **forgiveness** which is another blessing we receive from prayer as in talking to God we confess and repent of our sins as we see in **1John 1:9**

God also promises to provide us **divine wisdom and guidance** as a result of our prayers

As **James 1:5** says –

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Of course, just as with any other relationship, the more we commune with God the **closer we will become** and **our faith and trust in him will grow** as his faithfulness is demonstrated

Believe it or not God even says he will help us with our prayers when we are praying

Look at **Romans 8:26-27** –

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. 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.

Prayer will also help us to **understand God more fully** as we seek his will and experience his responses to our prayers

That's just a very partial list of the blessings that we can enjoy from prayer

However, there are some things we shouldn't expect from prayer

I'm not going to say that God won't or can't do whatever he might choose to do even by miraculous means but I will say that we shouldn't expect answers to prayer that we aren't willing to work for

What I mean by that is this –

God certainly expects us to pray for healing but we would be foolish to pray for healing while refusing to seek or accept medical treatment

God wants us to pray for our daily bread but he also expects us to work for our needs as we see in **2Thessalonians 3:10-12** where we are commanded to work to earn our living even as God gives us strength to work

God doesn't intend for us to act like baby birds and just sit with our mouths open waiting for them to be filled

We should not pray for understanding if we aren't willing to study even as God gives us minds to think

I remember very well the first time I took an exam in a Bible class and the professor prayed before he handed out the tests that we would all be rewarded according to our diligence in our studies

I would have much preferred him to pray that we would all get an A – but it would have been presumptuous to pray for an A if one didn't study

We would likewise be foolish to pray for the lost while neglecting to do anything to reach them with the gospel

Look with me at **Mark 1:35** –

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

You're probably thinking, "Okay, Jesus prayed. We know that"

But look down in **verse 38** what Jesus said when his disciples finally found him

And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

Even Jesus prayed and then got busy with ministry

God can do miracles but we shouldn't rely on miracles because God more often answers our prayers with our own sweat or the sweat of others

And just as God's Word says that we often don't have because we don't ask just as often we don't have because we don't act in combination with our prayers thereby cutting off God's chosen means of answering our prayers

Conclusion

Prayer is important – deep down we all know that's true

But still, we struggle to pray as regularly and as deeply as we know we should

A large reason for our lack of commitment to prayer is that we tend to over spiritualize prayer and make it too mystical

When all we have to do is talk to God just as we would talk to any close friend or family member

Like anything else praying will seem awkward and uncomfortable and you will be tempted to quit when you start

Satan will also try to stop you from praying because he recognizes the power of prayer

You will face interruptions and conflicts when you try to pray

Your mind will wander and you will get sidetracked and start thinking 1,000 thoughts rather than praying – count on it

Pray with paper and pencil nearby so that when things come to mind that you need to do you can jot them down for later and get back to the business of prayer

Or you can just go with those side-thoughts and talk to God about them

Perhaps God has things that he wants you to talk with him about and they may be coming to mind by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit

So talk about them and then get back to what you had on your mind when you began

If you find your mind goes blank when you sit down to pray; make a list – you wouldn't hesitate to prepare for any other important conversation

Find a time when you are alert and a place that is free from distraction and interruption

If you find your mind wandering try speaking out loud rather than praying silently

Pray alone but also take opportunity to pray with others

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)

And praying together fosters unity within the church as we share our common burdens, hopes, and requests

Praying together also leads to encouragement in the body as we hear like-minded individuals pray for one another

Like anything new getting started is often the hardest part and a person just has to decide they are going to start and then do it

Perhaps you fear God is angry with you because you've neglected prayer for too long and you are fearful of coming into his presence

But the first thing you should do is to run into his presence because God is the source of mercy and grace as we see in **Hebrews 4:16** –

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God loves you and he wants you to talk to him so go talk to him

Let's pray