

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Is Prayer Your Last Resort?

March 12, 2018

“Huddle around men!” As the pre-mission briefing concluded, my Sergeant called the platoon together. “Sir, you want to pray for us?” As I led the platoon in prayer, thirty heads bowed, including an atheist, Wiccan, Mormon, and several agnostics. Without fail, before every mission that my platoon went on in Afghanistan, we would pray together. Guys who didn’t believe in God, guys who didn’t want anything to do with God, and guys who ignored God in their everyday life back in the states gladly participated.

When I was deployed to Afghanistan, I was always amazed at the willingness of soldiers to participate in prayer, especially when they had such a negative view of God and prayer when we were stateside. It gave me such an insight into the “last resort” view much of our culture has of prayer. For many, it takes the realization that circumstances are truly outside of our control before we consider prayer a viable option.

This past weekend, Ben Snyder began a series called *Thoughts and Prayers* to address many of the misconceptions of prayer our culture has. Ben looked at the example of Jesus this past weekend to remind us that prayer is *not* a last resort, but it is something we are called to enter into continually as we follow Christ.

The dictionary defines prayer as “a solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God.” Prayer could also be defined as a verbal way through which we know God.

Unfortunately, even as Christians, we often don’t pray, or stop praying, because we come to think our prayer is ineffective. If we feel like prayer isn’t working, we’ll usually stop and point a finger at a few different things: we’ll either blame God for not listening, being too busy, or not caring; or we’ll blame ourselves, thinking we didn’t ask correctly or we don’t deserve the answer; we might even blame our request, maybe we didn’t use the right words, correct tone of voice, or physical posture.

This past weekend, we encountered Jesus’ reminder to us in Matthew 7 of the effectiveness of prayer.

Matthew 7:7-11

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you

will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹ You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ¹⁰ Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! ¹¹ So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

What an amazing passage! I am an imperfect father, yet I love my children more than I can put into words, and I want good things for them. I cannot even wrap my mind around the immensity of what God my father has in store for me based on what I want for my own children. As Ben unpacked the passage, he revealed how Jesus is teaching his followers that prayer becomes more effective when we are mindful and aware of three things: who we are talking with, who we are in relation to him (God), and what we are asking in his name. Throughout the rest of the week, we will be diving in and unpacking each of these areas and how they bring effectiveness to our prayers.

As we become more mindful of the above three areas this week, we need to remember that prayer was never a last resort for Jesus. Jesus understood and taught the effectiveness of prayer. Let's take the opportunity during this series to align our view of prayer with the one Jesus taught and give him the opportunity to reveal to us the effectiveness of our prayers.

Questions:

Have you ever given up praying for something because you thought your prayer was ineffective? If so, what did you give up praying for?

How does Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 7 change your view of prayer?

Next Steps:

Begin memorizing the series' memory verse: "The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results" (James 5:16b).

Identify & begin praying each day for a specific thing, issue, person, circumstance, request, etc.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, help me to see the effectiveness of my prayers. I can so easily miss the ways you are working all around me. Open my eyes to see your hand at work

over these next couple weeks. Let my view of prayer be shaped by you and not by the world I live in. Thank you for listening and answering. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Does Your View of God Affect Your Prayers?

March 13, 2018

Prayer is a means by which we connect with God. When I think about praying, the first prayer that comes to mind is “The Lord’s Prayer.” This prayer is often recited without considering how commanding the words actually are. To make our prayers more effective, today we are concentrating on “to whom” we are praying. Let us look at a few passages from the Bible that will help us to understand to whom we pray.

Matthew 6:9 (NIV)

This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...

I count myself lucky to have had an earthly father that was a truly selfless man. He was a great role model for generations of my family and showed unconditional love, so to pray to a heavenly Father brings good feelings. For others, this is not the case. Their fathers may have been abusive or completely absent. If you had a father like this, it may be difficult to understand that our heavenly Father makes up for everything earthly fathers lack, and then some. He treasures us more than he cherishes any of the creatures on the earth. Being able to call God, “Our Father” is intimate.

Psalms 147:5

How great is our Lord! His power is absolute! His understanding is beyond comprehension!

God is the great “I AM,” he is the creator of all things, he is omnipresent, he is all-powerful, he is most high, he is majestic, his name is set apart as holy, he is all-knowing, he is the ultimate authority, and his understanding is beyond measure!

Jeremiah 32:17

O Sovereign Lord! You made the heavens and earth by your strong hand and powerful arm. Nothing is too hard for you!

When we pray, we should pause to think about whom we are really praying to. God is the creator of all things. 70 Sextillion stars are in the Universe. That is seven (7) with 22 zeros: 70,000,000,000,000,000,000,000! That is only ONE of his creations. He created the earth and all that dwell within it. This should help us to understand that *everything* we pray for is within his power.

When we look at our prayers and examine them, they actually reveal a lot about our belief in God. If we have small prayers, maybe that is because we believe in a God that is only capable or interested in doing small things in our lives. However, when we know God and understand who he is, we are moved to believe that God can do great things through our prayers.

Questions:

Do you realize who HE really is?

Do you know what HE is capable of?

What do your prayers reveal about your belief in God?

Next Step:

Jesus' disciples saw how he prayed and noted his prayer was different from all others. They asked him to teach them to pray. Read Matthew 6:5-13 to learn the model prayer Jesus taught. As you read the verses, journal ideas that will guide you to expand your prayers, noting that God is all-powerful.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, give us wisdom to understand that you are all-powerful and everything we pray for, big or small, is within your power. Grant us courage to recognize your greatness and to use it to help us in our everyday lives. Help us to model our prayers after the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. In your Son's name, we pray. Amen.

What Does God Think About Me?

March 14, 2018

Today we are looking at Who we are to God.

The Bible describes who someone was by whose son they were. Matthew began the New Testament presenting the genealogy from Abraham to Jesus. Fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies and proving to all Jews that Jesus is the true Messiah by his lineage.

Nowadays, our family trees may only be known through an obituary or birth announcement. Today, we get to know each other all too often only through a Facebook post, Twitter tweet, Instagram picture, Snapchat story, or LinkedIn account. Unfortunately, we often don't have time for close relationships with each other, let alone close relationships with God. But, how we think God views us impacts our prayers. The truth is, God views us as his children and loves us unconditionally. Even when we sin, i.e. do something wrong, disobey him, or don't spend enough time with him, he still loves us.

Romans 8:15-17

¹⁵ So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. ¹⁷ And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

This verse teaches us so much about the way God views us. When we come to God with our prayers, we don't have to be fearful! He doesn't see us as slaves, he views us as his children. In fact, the term Abba used in these verses, is a term of warm affection confidently expressed by a son or daughter. It has no perfect equivalent in our language, but it is often compared to a child calling their father "Daddy". The next time you pray, remember that God views you as his child.

Questions:

When you think of your relationship with God, how do you believe God sees you?

What is the difference between being a slave to God and a child of God?

Next Steps:

Take a moment and reflect on the feelings that a loving daddy has toward their son or daughter. Write them down and think about them throughout today. Share your thoughts with someone else.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for seeing me as your child. I am so blessed to be able to call you Abba father. Help me to clearly see who I am to you and to remember that I am your child even in difficult circumstance or ongoing struggle. Amen

Are My Prayers a Blank Check From God?

March 15, 2018

Today we are looking at the importance of *what* we are asking in his name.

Have you ever asked God for something, but didn't get it or didn't receive the answer you were looking for? How do we cope with the death of a loved one after asking for God to heal them? The Bible says we should keep asking, and we will get it; and we can ask anything, and God will do it. But what if what I want is different than what my wife wants?

While those statements are in the Bible, it is important to read the entire context and look at the words Jesus used in these teachings. Let's first look at Matthew 7:7-11: "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

Again in John 14:14, Jesus himself says "ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!" Anything!!! That gives me hope when I pray, "God, please let the Browns win one game next season!"

These verses certainly lead me to believe that if I ask God for \$100 million and a private golf course and for my kids to never get sick then those things will happen, right? To answer this question, we need to read the entire passage and dig a little deeper.

Prior to inviting us to ask for anything we can imagine, Jesus says in John 14:12-13, "I tell you the truth, **anyone who believes in me** will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, **so that the Son can bring glory to the Father**. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!"

The first requirement is that we *believe* Jesus is who he said he is and who the Bible says he is - the Son of God, the atonement for our sins, and the only way to eternal life in heaven.

Next, he says that he will do the things we ask, in order *to bring glory to God*. Does my desire to have millions of dollars bring glory to God? It could, but it is an entirely selfish desire.

Matthew 7:9-11 goes on, “You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.”

It seems obvious that if our children are hungry, we feed them real food instead of telling them to eat dirt. God gives us the things that he knows are best **for us**. I don’t see any immediate downside to being a millionaire, but it would probably change some of the life choices I make and it would certainly decrease my dependence on God to provide my daily bread.

Then, what about James 4? Doesn’t it say that I don’t have millions because I haven’t asked for millions? Take a closer look. “You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don’t get it *because your motives are all wrong*—you want only what will give you pleasure (verses 2-3).

The tone of that passage changed quickly and forced me to look inward. Yes, I am jealous of what other people have. When I pray, am I asking God to provide what is best for me, or am I asking for what I think I want? Why am I asking for it? What are my motives, personal pleasure or God’s glory?

The words of 1 John 5:14-15 provide the instruction and the encouragement we can all use at this point: “And we are confident that **he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him**. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for.”

Questions:

When you pray, consider

1. Am I **asking** at all?
2. **How** am I asking?
3. **Why** am I asking?

4. **What** am I asking?

Next Steps:

Commit to praying for others, for yourself, and for the things that please God over the next week. If you don't know where to begin, or how, try this:

Prayer:

Our Father in heaven (**connect with God relationally**), may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come, may your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven (**pray for God's agenda first**). Give us today the food we need (**declare dependence on God**), and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us (**Get your heart right with God and others**). And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one (**believe in God's truth over the lies of the enemy**)

Our Earnest Prayers

March 16, 2018

One of my spiritual gifts is intercession, which is a fancy word that means ‘praying for others’. Since I became a Christian, I have always been fascinated with prayer and its power. The first nine months of CedarCreek Church, we spent hours and days praying about what God wanted our church to look like. Until I retired from the church staff at the end of 2013, I prayed every weekend over the seats for the people who would sit in them to hear the gospel message. (Now the members of the band and production teams pray over those seats at each campus! That’s how important prayer is!) Is there power in those prayers? I think so. I think God honors those prayers by guiding our leaders, by protecting us, by letting us grow, and by providing the resources and the people we need to meet the challenges that come as we move forward into the purpose God has for CedarCreek Church.

In those times of prayer as a new church, we always believed that God was bigger than anything we could imagine. We knew that God had amazing plans and purposes for us as individuals as well as us as his church. We were confident that we were praying in accordance to his will because what drove us was the desire to see unchurched and spiritually restless people come into a healthy, vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ! We *had* to pray. We knew nothing about planting a church. We knew if God didn’t show up for us, nothing would happen. All of our planning would be for nothing. We had to depend on God alone and trust him to provide everything we would need, and here we are!

Has God laid someone or something on your heart that he would have you make the focus of your prayers for the next several weeks, as Ben suggested? We encourage you to pray for family, friends, neighbors, or co-workers whom God might want you to invite to church this Easter. Maybe God is calling you to intercede for an organization or ministry for which you have a “holy discontent.” If you make that the focus of your prayers, you will most certainly discern how God wants you to be involved in that ministry. Perhaps a friend or loved one is struggling with their health, an addiction, or a relational conflict. Make it your joy to intercede for them with the God of the universe, who loves them, and you, more than you could ever imagine. Remember this series’ memory verse:

James 5:16(b)

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

Be earnest in your prayers this week. You will experience great power and wonderful results, and God will be glorified!

Questions:

Who does God want you to pray for in the days and weeks ahead?

Do you trust God to answer your prayers? How has he shown up in the past for you?

Next Steps:

Sometimes it is helpful to write out your prayers so you can keep track of the answers. In your journal or notebook this week, write out your specific request and date it. **Keep track of your persistence in prayer and how God answers your request.**

Prayer:

Abba Father, thank you that you love for us to ask for the many blessings you have for us. We trust in your great mercy and the good gifts you have for each of us. Help us to trust you and to be confident in our prayers. Amen.