

PRAYER: ITS PROMISE AND PROBLEM

Matthew 21:22

22And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

1 Peter 4:7

7The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

INTRODUCTION

- Today I'm going to begin a series on the most important thing that you can do as a Christian, other than reading your Bible
- It's prayer The simple act of talking to God
- There are many factors that contribute to and individual's spiritual growth, but nothing is as important as the practice of private prayer
- There are many reasons why a church is strong and healthy, but none more significant than prayer
- Some of you who have become members of this church, or who are now attending have been prayed for Let me name a few

Dave & Leslie Davis
Randy & Donna Hollopeter
Jim & Jill Ickes
Bill & Marcia Ihde
Dennis & Jenny Nestor
Bob & Nancy Potter
Roger & Linda Putnam
Jim & Karen Ries
Bob & Jane Roberts
Mike & Amy Sir Louis
Terry & Angela Sprague
Rob & Tricia Supan
Orawan Taikum
Kim Threatt
Doug & Cindy Wertz
David & Jackie Bair
John & Mary Kate Bush
Shellie Petit
Cheryl Soe
Tim & Anne Telepak, and
Mark & Tanya Whitmore

- God is the One who places the members within a church as He wills, but this is an example of how He acts in conjunction with the prayers of the saints
- God placed you on my heart, on Marcia's heart, and on the heart of other intercessors, and we began to ask God to place you within this church
- And of course we continue to intercede for you from time to time

THE POWER OF PRAYER

- Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's never-ending grace and power
- Prayer abounds in the Bible
- From the time of Seth, when "men began to call on the name of Lord (Genesis 4:26) to the culmination of all history in the book of Revelation, the people of God pray
- The Bible contains nearly 50 lengthy prayers recorded in prose sections, and several hundred shorter prayers or references to praying
- But it seems as if the writers of Scripture are far more interested in showing people at prayer than in telling about prayer

- We find the early church devoted to prayer, and we catch many glimpses of individuals in private prayer throughout the day
- Of course, the singular most important model for prayer is the revealed prayer habits of Jesus Christ Himself
- Nothing is promised to move the hand of God more than prayer
- God seems to take special delight in glorifying Himself through the prayers of the saints
- And yet, nothing is as challenging to you and to me, and to saints of all ages as the consistent, daily practice of prayer

WHAT IS PRAYER?

- Prayer is quite simply stated, conversation with God
- It is our attempt to communicate with God with our heart and our mind
- Prayer can be silent, it can be spoken, it can be done in groups
- Prayer is the spiritual dialogue between a child of God and His or her Father

- Prayer is the communication of a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ to his or here Master
- Prayer is our asking great things of God for ourselves and for others
- We all know that the Bible invites, encourages and commands us to pray
- And if honest, most of us would readily acknowledge that maintaining a vibrant and consistent prayer life can be our greatest spiritual challenges

THE PROMISES OF PRAYER

- We know that Jesus promised great things in response to prayer
- God wants to bless us and has every provision that we will every need
- God intends that our praying secure divine answers
- Prayer is simply not God's answer for something to do to keep us from being bored or lonely
- Prayer is the greatest and most supernatural ministry that you and I can ever have

- There are two spiritual disciplines that are absolutely essential to the development of our relationship with God: prayer and meditation upon His word
- For the next few weeks, we're going to focus on prayer
- Nothing will cause us to become more Christlike, and nothing will draw us closer to Christ that the practice of prayer
- Prayer changes livesprayer is the usual beginning of the Christian's life ...prayer brings about the specific forgiveness of our many sins....prayer causes us to grow spiritually....prayer extends the Kingdom of God upon the earth.....prayer changes heartsprayer brings people into the Kingdom of God
- Prayer brings about healing and miracles
- Prayer opens our minds to prophetic vision
- Prayer releases wisdom
- Prayer assists in bringing about the will of God upon the earth
- Prayer enables us to glorify God

THE PROBLEM WITH PRAYER

- It's not easy and it is not our normal experience to really desire to pray
- First of all, our indwelling sin is unalterably opposed to every activity that will make us more like Jesus Christ
- Our sin nature does not want to pray and it will find countless reasons to tell us why we shouldn't pray
- Here are a few of them

WE ALL STRUGGLE TO SOME DEGREE WITH SELF-SUFFICIENCY

A little boy was trying one day to move a huge rock in his back yard, and was trying with all of his might to shove that stone. His little muscles were bulging and his face was perspiring. He was biting his tongue and ever so determined to move that rock.

His Dad, watching from behind, asked his son if he was using every bit of strength that he had. The little boy replied, "Daddy, I'm using all my strength."

*His Dad said, "No, your'e not,
because you haven't asked me to
help you."*

- While we would all readily say that we need God, our prayer life most often doesn't back up the words of our mouth
- God has given us talents, and we can just kind of get by on our own
- Our pride will most often tell us that we know what we should do, and so we can just go through the course of our day without really seeking God's wisdom and direction
- We can become quite comfortable with our lifewe have sufficient food, clothing and comfortsso in reality most of us don't have too many great needs
- We can live fairly well on self-reliance, but when you come right down to it, self-reliance is a form of sin for a couple of reasons
- We're not really living and working for the glory of Godwe're just existing as we are

- Our lives can never be any greater than our prayer lives
- If we want to live for the glory of God then we must live in reliance on His grace His wisdom and His strengthwith continual thanksgiving
- Either we live dependent upon God, or we live dependent upon self
- The more dependent we are upon God, the greater our prayer life will be
- The more we rely upon ourselves, the less we will pray

OUR FLESH DOESN'T WANT TO PRAYER

- John Owen, in his wonderful work, *Sin and Temptation*, sums up the struggle by saying,

There is no duty we perform for God that sin does not oppose. And the more spirituality or holiness there is in what we do, the greater is the opposition. Thus, those who seek most for God, experience the strongest opposition.¹

¹ Owen, John, *Sin and Temptation* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Print, 1994)

- John Own was summing up the working of indwelling sin ... it is always there to oppose our spiritual pursuits
- If we've determined that early morning prayer is a goal, an inner voice will be reminding us the night before just how tired we are and how tired we will be the next day if we miss sleep
- There are numerous activities in the course of our day that seem to be much more interesting and important than prayer
- Prayer is just not naturalprayerlessness is very natural to us
- But Scripture tells us that prayerlessness is sin
- John Bunyan, in Pilgrim's Progress, wrote:

Prayer will make a man cease from sin, and sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.

**WE LIVE LIFE IN A WORLD THAT
COMPETES AGAINST OUR SPIRITUAL
LIFE**

- There are all of the legitimate cares of this world that require our time, energy and attention

- We have our jobs our marriages, our children, and our education
- We have our homes, our cars, our yards and all of our belongings to take care of
- The days can be very full and can just pass us by without our carving out particular periods of time to devote to prayer
- We can become satisfied with snippets of prayer throughout the daywhich in themselves are goodbut never quite get to the place of devoting significant periods of time to personal prayer

WE STRUGGLE WITH UNBELIEF

- Donald Whitey wisely writes,

Often we do not pray because we doubt that anything will actually happen if we pray. Of course, we don't admit this publicly. But if we felt certain of visible results within 60 seconds of every prayer, there would be holes in the knees of every pair of Christian-owned pants in the world.²

² Whitney, Donald S., *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress 1991

- We may think that God isn't able to change a situation that concerns us
- We may have prayed many times before about a particular situation and nothing has changed
- And a Scripture comes to mind about making "vain repetitions" so we stop praying and don't consider the verses that enjoin us to "pray without ceasing"
- We can think that since God is Sovereign and can do and will do anything that He desires to do, why do I need to pray?
- Well it is true that God is Sovereign and that He can and will do whatever He desiresyet scripture calls us to persevering prayer

**WE'VE TRIED MANY TIMES TO DEVELOP
A CONSISTENT PRAYER LIFE AND NEVER
REALLY GROWN MUCH**

- Most of us in this room who love God and want to do His will could say this
- Especially so is we read testimonies of other Christians who have seemed to have powerful prayer lives

- We compare ourselves to them and tell ourselves that we'll never be like themso why try again?
- That's exactly where Satan and his legion of demons would want us to stayspiritually immobilizedineffectivesatisfied with our present relationship with Godspiritually silent much of the time

PRAYER HAS A PRICE

- The problem with prayer, at least the kind of prayer that the Bible models for us, is that THERE IS A PRICE TO PAY
- Biblical praying will always cost us something
- We have to pay a price in order to pray consistently
- What's the price?
- We're going to have to say no to something else in order to say yes to prayer
- We're going to have to give up a chunk of time
- We may have to sacrifice a half-hour of sleep

- We may have to forgo some personal pleasure
- We may have to reschedule our week so that we can attend a corporate prayer gathering
- We may have to make some things right in our relationship with God so that we can boldly and freely come to Him in prayer

MY DREAM FOR THE PRAYER LIFE OF COVENANT OF GRACE CHURCH

PERSONAL, PRIVATE PRAYER

- My dream is that we follow the patterns for prayer that we find in the New Testament
- Let's start with private prayer
- Jesus said in

Matthew 6:6

6But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

- Imagine what would happen if each one of us did this consistentlyif each one of us were deliberate to pray privately

- If each one of us became deliberate to desire personal and private communion with God
- What would this church be like if each of us grew to the point of doing this every day
- What would happen if we spent some time each day thanking God for His many blessings and praising Him for His countless perfections?
- What would happen if daily we asked the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin so that we might confess them
- Think of how much better our lives could become if we consistently asked for God's help and wisdom each and every day?
- Think of what might happen if each and every one of us began to pray for others in our care group on a consistent basis?
- Think of the growth that God would work in this church if we were committed to daily, private prayer
- This is my dreamthat God would build the church through the daily prayers of its members

HUSBANDS AND WIVES CONSISTENTLY PRAYING TOGETHER

1 Peter 3:7

7Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

- Imagine what God could do if husbands and wives consistently purposed to pray together
- Consider the improvement God would bring about in our marriages if husbands searched their hearts daily to see if they were treating their wives in such a way that their prayers were being hindered?
- The first prayers just might be prayers of confession, but after clearing the channel of communication between ourselves and God, imagine the effect of husbands and wives together on their knees, praying for their marriage and their children, and the church and the world

FAMILIES

- The apostle Paul instructed us in

Ephesians 6:4

4Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

- My dream is that every family would consistently experience times when Dad would lead his wife and children by teaching them the word of God and then lead his family in prayer

SMALL GROUPS

- James tells us

James 5:16

16Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

- Imagine what God would do with our lives and this church if we all met together with one or two other members of the same sex for personal growth
- All includedno one left outeveryone meeting regularly in a small group for the purpose of mutual confession and prayer
- Picture the effect of these weekly times together The friendships that would develop, the patterns of persistent sin that could be broken, the prayers of healing, the mutually building up of one another in the faith
- Dallas Willard has written these few words that speak volumes:

Confession alone makes deep fellowship possible and the lack of it explains much of the superficial quality so commonly found in church associations

- Think of the spiritual growth that could occur in your life through the prayers and encouragement of those who know you best

CORPORATE PRAYER

Acts 2:42

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

- My dream is that when we have a corporate prayer gathering, all who can come together
- My dream is that God will give us such an understanding of the power of prayer that we will be looking for opportunities to gather together for corporate prayer
- My dream is that, more and more, we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word
- I dream of a fervency in intercession that moves the hand of God

- I dream that we will learn to hear the voice of the Spirit during times of prayer and that we will increasingly pray in accordance with God's will