

## PRAYER

Nov 21

As I prepared what to bring you this morning it did cross my mind that among all of us gathered here, collectively how many messages have we heard on prayer, topic of prayer. I imagine it would be 1000's. That almost put enough doubt into my mind to not speak on, prayer. But I know, irrespective of how often we've been urged, encouraged, called to prayer, it cannot be exhausted. Why, 2 reasons: *to not pray* is to totally give way to what the enemy wants and be defeated by him. *To pray*, and to be in prayer is undeniably what the word of God calls us to do.

*(Packer) Men (and women) who know their God are before anything else men (and women) who pray, and the first point where their zeal and energy for God's glory come to expression is in their prayers. If there is little energy for such prayer, and little consequent practice of it, this is a sure sign that as yet we scarcely know our God.<sup>1</sup>*

And so with a week-of-prayer (and for those who choose, fasting) ahead of us, want to talk about prayer this morning. For those that joined last week you'll recall the last point from Lamentations 3:19-25 was ACTION. That is, putting into action **I believe that great is Gods faithfulness**. Into action that we trust God. Prior to that we talked about unity from Jesus' great prayer for Christ-followers in John 17. This is a unity among ourselves that communicates the love and truth of God to the world through (hear this) our oneness. So there is a sense in which unity (*what we have with each other*) and the faithfulness of God (*who God is*) form the backbone for a united, faith-filled, Christ-focussed week of prayer. *What do I mean?* Prayer unites us and prayer drives us to depend on Gods faithfulness – what else can we do.

Let me read to you what I believe to be one of the most defining teachings of prayer in the entire bible. Phil. 4:4-7 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Church family I don't know about you but as every new day comes around I find myself more desperate to see God move, for God to speak – for us to hear God as he has spoken to us, and for us to obey God and be led by him. Want to say something deeply theological: *we just need him!*

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<sup>1</sup> [J. I. Packer Quotes About Prayer | A-Z Quotes \(azquotes.com\)](http://J.I.PackerQuotesAboutPrayer/A-ZQuotes(azquotes.com))

And apart from all the scripture we'll read this week, the verses of scripture we've just read ring so many bells, tick heaps of boxes, give us all the encouragement we need as we come to pray.

You may be wondering why and how it is these verses apply to prayer and, to a week of prayer when it's plainly obvious that the context is Paul addressing a dispute between 2 people. The answer is that these verses set the pattern of how we be in the Spirit, how we despite points of difference rightly conduct ourselves, how we deal with the anxiety of huge issues by bringing them before God in prayer, with gratitude. In more simple terms these verses **put our attitude right toward others** and **our posture right before God**. Phil. 4:4-7 Paul gives us a strong directive on how we do that.

***Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!***

*The more you praise, the more vigor you will have for prayer; and the more you pray, the more matter you will have for praise.<sup>2</sup>*

***Let your gentleness be evident to all.***

***The Lord is near.***

***Do not be anxious about anything,***

***but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.***

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

Putting into practice what Paul says here is akin to being a rejoicing, gentle, Christ-focussed, spiritually healthy, ordered, full-of-thanksgiving church, that has as an added benefit the promise of knowing "*the peace of God, ...*". **Put our attitude right toward others** and **our posture right before God**.

Putting what Paul says into practice also provides us the opportunity to see things through Gods eyes, with **and from his perspective**. So crucial in prayer. Why we come with his agenda on our hearts not ours. *Illustration that makes my point.*

"Alexander Schmemmann, the late priest who led a reform movement in Russian Orthodoxy, tells of a time when he was travelling on the underground in Paris, France, with his fiancée.

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<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer Quotes About Prayer | A-Z Quotes (azquotes.com)

At one stop an old and ugly woman dressed in the uniform of the Salvation Army got on and found a seat nearby. The two lovers whispered to each other in Russian about how repulsive she looked. A few stops later the woman stood to get off. As she passed them she said in perfect Russian, 'I wasn't always ugly.' That woman was an angel of God, Schmemann used to tell his students. She opened his eyes, searing his vision in a way he would never forget."<sup>3</sup>

God, used that situation to help this man see things differently. So what are we looking at and seeing, and thinking about stuff going on around us that we must see as God sees? Gods perspective is crucial when it comes to prayer and Paul invites us to empty ourselves of ourselves to see things Gods way.

The keys to **putting our attitude right toward others** and **our posture right before God** and seeing things **from his perspective**, as we come to pray are right here in these verses!

God's perspective is so important because ultimately **God is the focus of our prayer**

Prayer is the thing that God has given to us not for us to get what we want from God, but for what God wants to give us and do in us and do through us. Prayer is the vehicle God has given us to voice our dependence on him.

*Ps. 18:6 In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.*

*Ps. 46:1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*

*Ps. 61:2 Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I*

And even with how he answers prayer and what he does and what he does here, in us may not be the answer we want, but he's still answered. *His way*. Just maybe God is moving in a way, we don't see or agree with, but God is still moving, hearing, and answering prayer.

There is a very simple way of keeping **Gods perspective** and **God as the focus of our praying**: "God I ask that you be glorified in...*name circumstance*).

I want to suggest this is such an important aspect of our praying, particularly corporate prayer. There is a lot of frustration and anger out there, the whole Covid thing has become very emotive, and this can sometimes burst out unexpectedly. I'm very comfortable in discussing such matters with you one-on-one. But I'm asking that we as a church be wise and God-focussed in our praying and prayer gatherings. That our "*gentleness (will) be evident to all*", that "*the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus*". Prayer is not a time for espousing our personal views, but is, *presenting our requests to God with thanksgiving*,

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<sup>3</sup> Yancy, Philip "Prayer, does it make any difference?"

You know in this past week I've heard stories of massive fights going in churches, pastors interrupting prayer meetings to address inappropriate government-hating prayers, folk being asked to leave services because they've completely ambushed worship gatherings. Division is happening already...

But folks when God is the focus of our prayer it puts us (Gal. 5:25) in step with the Holy Spirit and aligns with Jesus' way of praying which is *"seek first his kingdom and his righteousness"* (Matt. 6:33)

### **Who can tell what God might do when we pray!?**

I believe that a church's genuineness in worship and hunger for God to move is directly related to that church's prayer life.<sup>4</sup> Imagine a church where there was never or rarely prayer offered. F.B. Meyer said *"The greatest tragedy in life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer"*. We cannot ever folks underestimate prayer or undervalue prayer. We cannot know if it might be your heart God the Holy Spirit is prompting to pray for an individual, for a certain circumstance...we cannot think I don't need to because somebody else will. It might just be your prayer God is wanting to hear! **Who can tell what God might do when we pray!?**

(Eph. 3:20) *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.*

(1 John 5:14-15) *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us...*

Folks scripture is full of examples of what God has done, and can still do, in response to prayer.

### **The Call to Prayer**

Today, can we see the urgency of prayer and the need to pray. Can we see the correlation between prayer and our own church unity? Prayer as it serves to mitigate against any sort of destructive and divisive conversation and attitudes toward one-another. Prayer that despite our personal views on things drives us toward God who is faithful and makes us determined to hear his heart over our own. Prayer that asks God for all the wisdom we need as a church to make good decisions.

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<sup>4</sup> If it's not prayer that a church's ministry is birthed out of, whose strength are we operating in? Charles Spurgeon *"We shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians"*

**So as we pray we've talked about our attitude being right toward others, our posture right before God, seeing things from his perspective.**

With that in mind You will no doubt pray very specific things as you pray, but let me give you 3 things I have on my heart, for our church, when it comes to praying?

### **Matters for Prayer**

- **Glory:** 1 Chron. 29:10-11 *"Praise be to you, LORD, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.*
- **Unity:** Phil. 2:1-4 *Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. **Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.***
- **Mission:** Matt. 28:18-20 *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

### **Communion**