

## A Gospel-Centered Prayer Life

### Intro

#### The oft-elusive 'prayer life'

- The demand for books on prayer continues because so many Christians remain dissatisfied with their prayer lives.
  - *Without ceasing* I mention you always in my prayers (Rom 1:9-10)
  - I give thanks to my God *always* for you. (1 Cor 1:4)
  - I *do not cease* to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. (Eph 1:16)
  - Praying *at all times* in the Spirit. (Eph 6:18)
  - *We have not ceased* to pray for you. (Col 1:9)
  - *Continue steadfastly* in prayer. (Col 4:2)
  - *Always* struggling on your behalf in his prayers. (Col 4:12)
  - *Constantly* mentioning you in our prayers. (1 Thes 1:2)
  - We also thank god *constantly* for this. (1 Thes 2:13)
  - *As we pray most earnestly night and day.* (1 Thes 3:10)
  - *We always* pray for you. (2 Thes 1:11)
  - I remember you *constantly* in my prayers *night and day.* (2 Tim 1:3)
  - Be *constant* in prayer. (Rom 12:12)
  - Pray *without ceasing.* (1 Thes 5:17)

#### **Matthew 6:9-13**

#### The Lord's Prayer in Church History

- Luther and the Reformers considered the Lord's Prayer to be the wellspring and summation of all prayer that honors God. All that we could ever need or ask for as Christians is, in principle, found here.
- Though we could focus on the comprehensiveness of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, tonight we're going to consider the 'heart-orientation' that must be present for a right understanding and practice of prayer.

## Foundations for a Gospel-Centered Prayer Life

### Theology: Who is God & how does He interact w/our prayers?

Matt 6:5-8

- Jesus corrects wrong approaches:
  - ▶ Religious Showmanship - lacks a true private life of devotion
  - ▶ Pagan Techniques – extend prayer so that God knows “we’re serious”.
- One of the great needs we have is to think of God more often than we think about prayer. And when we think of God we need to be careful to think of Him not as a force or an experience but a Person.

▶ **Conversation-focused conversation**

“A praying life feels like our family mealtimes because prayer is all about relationship.... We don’t think about *communication* or *words* but about whom we are talking with... Oddly enough, many people struggle to learn how to pray because they are focusing on praying, not on God. Making prayer the center is like making *conversation* the center of a family mealtime. In prayer, focusing on the conversation is like trying to drive while looking *at* the windshield instead of *through* it.” **-Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*, p.20**

**Identity: Who are you?**

Matt 6:9 “... Our Father”

▶ **Military Physicians Prayer Breakfast**

“*What a man is on his knees, that he is and no more.*”

- Jesus begins this prayer by calling their attention to the issue of identity. He wants them coming before God not to showcase religiosity (hypocrites) or to twist God's arm (pagan Gentiles) but to appeal to Him as His children (our Father).

### **Gospel: Where will you turn for help?**

Mt 6:9-13

- To the degree that we consider ourselves pure, wise, and strong we will not pray.

#### **▶ Parenting in prayer**

- This is where we find that prayer is an echo of the gospel. Prayer dramatizes the story of needy, unrighteous, poor, beggars who are justified, healed, sustained, and changed by Christ.

#### **▶ Made aware of our helplessness, we cry out in prayer**

- At the end of the day, what is it that you put your hope in?
- When we as Christians live as those who are without God – functional atheism sets in, cynicism sets in, prayerlessness sets in...
- And the consolation and good news of Psalm 23, for instance, is gutted of all its gospel.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

-Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*, p.88

***How does prayer reflect something of the gospel?***

- Prayer gets its oxygen from the truth that, because of Christ's work on the cross, we are God's children and God loves to hear His children speak to Him.

"In my childhood I came nearer to "Pray without ceasing" than in any other period of my life. As far back as I can remember, I had the habit of thanking God for everything I received, and asking him for everything I wanted. If I lost a book, or any of my playthings, I prayed that I might find it. I prayed walking along the streets, in school and out of school... I did not do this in obedience to any prescribed rule. It seemed natural. I thought of God as an everywhere present being, full of kindness and love, who would not be offended if children talked to him. I knew he cared for sparrows. I was as cheerful and happy as the birds and acted as they did."

-Charles Hodge

"The gospel, God's free gift of grace in Jesus, only works when we realize we don't have it all together. The same is true for prayer. The very thing we are allergic to – our helplessness – is what makes prayer work. It works because we *are* helpless. We can't do life on our own. Prayer mirrors the gospel. In the gospel, the Father takes us as we are because of Jesus and gives us his gift of salvation. In prayer, the Father receives us as we are because of Jesus and gives us his gift of help. We look at the inadequacy of our praying and give up, thinking something is wrong with us. God looks at the adequacy of his Son and delights in our sloppy, meandering prayers."

-Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*, p.55