

(Radical Jesus) 32 Radical Prayer

by Glenn Meldrum

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a vibrant life of prayer that is centered on a passionate pursuit of God, and that this is essential for living a true and holy life as a Christian.

Duration: 25:28

Scripture: Jeremiah 3:10, Jeremiah 29:11-14, Matthew 6:33, Luke 15:11-32, John 3:16

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher highlights the lack of passion and desperation for God among professing Christians. He emphasizes the need for revival in our land and how it can only come when we truly seek God with all our hearts. The preacher also discusses the selfish nature that all humans possess as a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God. He references Jeremiah 29:11-14, emphasizing God's plans for mankind and the promise that He will be found when sought with all our hearts. The sermon concludes with a reference to the story of the prodigal son as an example of why people backslide and the importance of returning to God.

Transcript

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For the last three weeks we have been studying the radical nature of prayer. So far we have looked at how Jesus is our ultimate example in all things true, righteous, and holy, and this includes prayer. He is our faultless model in what it means to live a life of prayer.

Through his life we can see the tremendous importance that all true followers of Jesus must be people of prayer, especially pastors and spiritual leaders. We also examine the necessity that churches are houses of prayer, first and foremost, above any other ministry or church activity. If any church is not a house of prayer, then that church is only a social club or charitable institution.

This week we will dig into the necessity that believers become people of prayer. Let me at this point bring definition to a couple of phrases I will use in this lesson, which is people of prayer and person of prayer. There is a big difference between people that pray and people of prayer.

All kinds of people that do not know God pray occasionally, and many even pray regularly. But people of prayer are true disciples of Jesus that live a life of prayer out of their desire for his nearness. They have grown to love him deeply, which in turn compels them to spend time with him each and every day.

People that pray primarily perform this religious act out of the ambition that God would do something for them, such as bless or prosper them. Selfishness is their principal motivation in praying, and this has nothing to do with wanting God himself. So a person of prayer or people of prayer speaks about having a living, vibrant relationship with the living God.

They are pursuing God out of loving desire for him, not out of what he can do for them. Now I need to point out that it is not wrong for us to pray about our personal needs. Jesus taught us to do that.

However, our principal motivation in prayer should not be to get from God, but to get God himself. And when we truly belong to Jesus, when his heart becomes our heart, then we will have everything we truly need in this life. I recently received a phone call from a man I knew when I was a young believer.

The only thing I heard about him in recent years came through the grapevine that he was divorced. Somehow he came across my website and read some of my articles and listened to a few of my sermons. He was deeply touched by these and decided to give me a call one morning.

After talking to him for a few minutes, I made mention that Jessica and I had recently joined the Facebook crowd. I then told him how heartbroken we were over all the people that we had known through the years that are now backslidden. Some of these people were saved in the same revival that Jessica and I were a part of as young believers.

A few of the backsliders had even been a part of our church that I pioneered in inner city Detroit. This brother then began to confess that he had only recently come back to the Lord after a long season of living in rebellion against God. I then stated that there is only one reason why people backslide, and that reason can be clearly seen in the story of the prodigal son.

He did not know what that one reason was until I revealed it to him. The majority of the church does not know why people really backslide or understand why the prodigal son left his father. There is only one reason why people backslide, and that is because they forsake their first love.

They stop loving the Father with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength. We then talked about why it is necessary that we love Jesus more than sin, self, and the world. If we do not have a better love than what our sinful nature loves, then we will not have the motivation to live near Jesus and to conquer the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

We must have a better love, or we will not walk near to Jesus in loving obedience. When true followers of Jesus love Him with all of their being, they will never backslide. There is such a thing as eternal security, but it comes only about by clinging to Jesus with all of our being, and not because we prayed a sinner's prayer or once walked with Jesus or regularly attend church.

Left to ourselves, there is nothing to protect us from the influence and power of this world or from the devilish assaults that come from the hater of our soul. It is only by loving Jesus with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength that we will have the grace to live the victorious Christian life. Those that do not love Him with all of their being will surely become idolaters, because something must fill all the parts of their heart that they do not let Jesus fill.

It is those other loves that beguile us away from Jesus, but that can only happen when we do not let Jesus fill every fiber of our heart and mind. We then went on to talk about the necessity of learning how to love and enjoy being with Jesus, and this is something that is not greatly understood in the church today. Here is where prayer becomes vitally important in the survival of a Christian.

It is true that we need a vibrant life of prayer so we can intercede for the needs of others. Yet before we can have powerful and effective intercession for those in need, we must first have a deep, Spirit-filled life of prayer that is in hot pursuit of God so we can walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. But most of all, we need a rich, loving, soul-stirring life of prayer to stay true to Jesus so that we can love Him with all that is within us.

If we remove the relational dimension that is a part of God-designed prayer, then all we have left is worthless prayer of dead religion. When we look at Jesus, what kind of prayer do we find? The repetitious prayer that is advocated by the Catholic Church and other mainline denominations? No, not at all. People that repetitiously pray the Lord's Prayer do not understand what Jesus was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus never prayed to the Father worthless prayers of vain repetition. And if Jesus never prayed in such a way, then we should never pray in such a way either. Jesus is not interested or moved by meaningless, repetitious prayers that are rattled off in a lifeless life of prayer.

Try talking to your spouse and your children that way and see if it produces any good results. Every time you see your wife or husband, you say the same identical thing over and over again. What do you think the results will be? You will drive them nuts while driving them away from you.

When they see you come, they will run the opposite direction. Do you think the Lord wants us to say the same thing over and over in empty repetition? Do you think he is deaf so we must repeat the prayers over and over again until he might hear? Or is he an unintelligent being that we have to go through the same prayer again and again, day after day, hoping that he might grasp our meaning? I am being a little facetious here. But as I've said before, we do to God what would destroy any relationship among people, yet we think we are doing the right thing.

And this is just plain ridiculous. Prayer is all about relationship. And that which builds strong relationships with people will also build a strong relationship with God.

The opposite is also true. That which destroys relationships between people will surely destroy our relationship with God. Good, honest, transparent communication is of vital importance for quality relationships between people.

When communication breaks down, so does the relationship. For people to love each other, they must know each other. And for love to grow deeper and stronger, their knowledge of each other must grow in accordance with their desire to love each other.

This means that to grow in love for God, our communication with him must mature as well. What is prayer other than communication with God? Effective prayer has more to do with the quality of the time that we have with God rather than the time that we spend with him in prayer. Yet when people passionately love Jesus, they will want to spend much time with him.

And when anything reduces their time with Jesus, they will ache to find that secret place with him. This is why the Lord expects every believer to have an ongoing, vibrant life of prayer. The Lord knows that what we need more than anything is himself.

And he knows that a living, passionate life of prayer is central to this. He does not command us to pray because it fills a need inside of him, since there is nothing that God needs outside of himself to be fulfilled or to be who he is. The Lord commands us to pray for our benefit.

The problem we have with our rebellious nature is that what God commands us to do, we often fight against as if he was commanding us to do something that was harmful to us or to others. Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord in chapter 29, verses 11 through 14. And many of you are familiar with this section of scripture.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans that prosper you and not to harm you, plans that give you hope in a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all of your heart.

I will be found by you, declares the Lord. Let me just touch on a couple of points that are found in this section of scripture. First, God has a plan for us, for all of mankind.

Though these verses were directly spoken to the Israelites that were exiled to Babylon, the principle is found in many places in both Testaments. John 3.16 tells us, for God so loved the world, which tells us that he has a plan to give people hope and a future. But that hope and salvation is found only through Jesus and is only obtainable to those that will bow their will to him.

Here's the main point I want to touch on from these verses that I just read in Jeremiah, that God wants us to call on him because he wants to answer our prayers. Since the Lord has established that prayer is totally about relationship between God and the individual and that he is a great king, then our prayers should be fitting to the person to whom we address our prayers. God declared that he would be found by us under one condition, that we would seek him and find him when we would seek him with all of our heart.

This is the wholehearted passion and pursuit of God, and it is what he completely deserves as Almighty God. Passionless, apathetic prayer is a disgrace to God. It screams that we do not believe that Christ is worthy of our passion and pursuit.

Lifeless prayers and spiritless prayer meetings also telegraph to the world that the Lord is not worth pursuing, that he is not worth living for, much less dying for. The low view of God that is currently held by much of the American church has produced such an apathetic level of devotion that the world is not interested in our dead faith. Do we comprehend how our spiritual apathy is an insult to God and disgraces him before a perishing world? When professing Christians can scream and shout over ball games, while having no passion about the things of God, is there any wonder why we do not have revival in our land? The Lord promised that he would come to us when we would finally grow so desperate for him that we would seek him with all of our heart.

This is about wanting Jesus enough that we will do whatever it takes that we may gain Christ. One of the results of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God is that the entire human race is now infused with a selfish character from which we are powerless to deliver ourselves. Every unsaved person is selfish to a lesser or

greater degree because they do not have the Spirit of God dwelling inside of them.

They do not have strength or power enough to transform their selfish nature into one that is truly selfless. When people come to Christ and obtain the free gift of salvation, they always come for selfish reasons, such as they do not want to go to hell or they are sick of the pain or weary of their guilt of sin. Selfish people can only come to Jesus for selfish reasons.

They do not have the ability to come to Christ for selfless reasons. I am very glad that he will take us in our selfish condition, otherwise nobody could ever be saved. Though he first receives us in our selfish condition, he will not leave us in that same condition if we have truly given our life to him.

Salvation is absolutely radical because it takes a rebellious sinner and transforms him or her from the inside out. Though this process has a beginning, it does not have an end until we see our dear Savior's glorious face in heaven. Our Lord is out to deliver us from our selfish, sinful nature through the transformation of our character to be like his selfless nature.

This means that powerful, effective prayer is tied into who we are, into our character, into the holy life we are commanded to live out. Our natural human love is selfish. It is a taking love, a demanding love that destroys whatever it touches.

Our fallen, sinful love is repulsive to God because it is the total opposite of his holy nature. So when people come to Christ, he is out to transform our selfish nature and selfish love into a selfless nature and selfless love. Selfish, self-centered prayer is all about the individual, about his or her personal needs, wants, and desires.

Selfish prayers are easy prayers to pray because they come out of our sinful nature. And even in those times when selfish people pray for others, selfishness will, in one way or another, still make self the center of the issue. In this condition of prayer is a combination of a wish list and demands and duty.

Prayer in this spiritual condition is not very enjoyable because it never is seeking after God, but after that which benefits our selfish nature. This is why the Lord is laboring in the lives of his true followers to deliver them from their selfishness because they will never learn the joy of passionately seeking after God in their selfish condition. The joy of fellowship with God is God himself, not what he can give us or do for us.

Selfishness never lets us see the prize of the Christian faith, which is unbroken fellowship with God. And this is the highest honor given to mankind. The Lord rebuked Judah in Jeremiah 3.10 because she did not return to the Lord with all of her heart but only in pretense.

What is the idea here? The people knew they needed to walk with God, but they loved their sin and did not really want God. Verse 9 tells us why. Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.

Since the people did not have a passion for God, they did not have a passion to be holy. They forsook the Lord to follow the idols they loved and the sins that so easily beset them. They failed to see the prize of knowing God.

When we begin to passionately pursue the Lord, it is because we are growing in love for him. And the more we love him, the more we will love what he loves and hate what he hates. To live contrary to Christ means that we do not love him.

It means that we are idolaters that love our sin in rebellious ways. True holiness is always relational because it is a desire to be pleasing to God. When we long to know God in a greater way, holiness will always be an integral part of the equation.

We cannot passionately pursue God while we pursue sin, for the two are complete opposite to each other. They are repulsive to each other. This is why when you look at the greatest men and women in Scripture and in church history, you will always find that their passion to know God compelled them to live true and holy lives as free from the world and compromise as possible.

The more people taste of what it means to enjoy God, and as they long for his nearness in ever increasing degrees, you will find they even flee from the questionable things. They don't even want the worldly ideas and areas of compromise in their life. All they want is Jesus.

They have tasted of the wonder of his tangible presence, and they seek his face because they want him. Nothing else matters. They become a people consumed with knowing God, and they have the cry of Paul on their lips, I want to know Christ.

The prize of all prizes awaits us, and that is Christ himself. Anything that obscures his glorious face becomes sin to us. Those that want to know Christ will flee from any and every expression of sin out of a passionate longing for the Savior's nearness.

Anything that reveals his lovely face, true saints will seek to implement in their lives with ardent desire. Prayer is all about the passionate pursuit of God and the seeking after holiness flows out of that desire for his nearness. He offers us the greatest of all gifts, which is himself.

Yet we can be virtually blind to this infinite treasure and grow so stubborn that we cannot comprehend what this faith is really all about. Though I have touched on the subject of prayerless Christians in the past few podcasts, I want to go back to this issue for a few minutes before I close. Actually, the phrase prayerless Christians is an oxymoron, a contradiction of terms, because there is no such thing as a prayerless Christian.

Biblical Christianity is all about relationship with God. The Word of God tells us how mankind originally had fellowship with God, how that relationship was broken, how it was restored, and that heaven is where the redeemed will have eternal, unbroken fellowship with God. People that enter into God's salvation enter into fellowship with him.

If people are not in active fellowship with God, then they are not saved, because Biblical Christianity is all about relationship with God. The cross is all about restoring mankind to right fellowship with the Lord through the atoning work of Christ. Grace is all about God making a way that we could walk with him in genuine fellowship through the transforming power of grace.

Prayerless people cannot be truly saved because they are not in active fellowship with God. They are not appropriating the grace of God that leads people into holy life so they can fellowship with a holy God. Let me take this idea a little bit further.

People that love God love being with him because they love who he is. Prayerless people are idolaters because they love other things more than God. They would rather do other things than to spend time with Jesus in the place of prayer.

Either they love people more than God, or social media, TV, money, possessions, alcohol, and the list of idols goes on. Since they love the world more than God, they act like the world instead of acting like Jesus. Prayerless Christians can only operate in the flesh.

They love the flesh and promote the works of the flesh. Husbands and wives that walk near to Jesus do not get divorced. Since they walk in the Spirit, they bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and the fruit of the Spirit as spoken of by Paul in Galatians 5 will always produce fantastic marriages and loving families.

Divorce happens because selfish people practice their selfishness to the destruction of their family and children, and this is true for those that claim to be Christian. The spiritual fruit they bear is what Paul calls the acts of the sinful nature, and these ungodly character traits can produce nothing but death and sorrow, for that is all they have to give. For those that claim to love Jesus and get a divorce, there is one principal reason that it happened.

They did not walk near to Jesus, and as a result, their character was defined by the acts of the sinful nature. By not living near Jesus, they did not walk in the power of His transforming grace, so the works of the flesh produce the only thing that it can produce, which is death and ruin. You will find that people who claim to be Christian yet get divorced, that they are either prayerless people or people that do not live out a life of prayer.

Since God hates divorce, those that love God will love what God loves and hate what He hates, and this includes divorce. So when marriages break down, you will always find prayerlessness at the root of the problem. Their prayerlessness and compromise disgraces Christ before their children, family, friends, and the world.

It says that Jesus is weak, powerless, and insignificant because He cannot help a man and woman to selflessly love each other. All these things, and even more, are the result of not being like the radical Jesus who dwelt in constant communion with His Father. Let me take this even a little further now.

Prayerless people are rebellious people because they live independent from God, which tells us that they do not allow God to rule over their lives. If they were desperate for God, they would not be rebellious. The rebellion that they live out on a constant basis produces in them the spiritual fruit of that rebellion, which is the acts of the sinful nature.

Paul said in Galatians 5, verses 19-21, the acts of the sinful nature are obvious, sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. I am not going to take the time to explain what each of those sins include, but notice that Paul declared that the acts of the sinful nature are obvious.

Can you see the acts of the sinful nature in you? They are obvious to other people, to your spouse, to your children, to friends, but are they obvious to you? Do you have spiritual eyes to see them, or have you grown so blind that you cannot even comprehend their existence in your life? Prayerless people are spiritually blind because they cannot see the depths of their depravity nor their tremendous need for God. This causes them to live without divine help, so they have to do everything through the sinful nature that can only bring ruin. It is easy for us to point out the sins of others, but can we point out our own? And if we see expressions of the acts of the sinful nature in our lives, are we willing to do anything about it? To see our sin and then in blatant rebellion continue on our sin is worse than those that are spiritually blind to

what they are on the inside.

Look at how many marriages break down because the husband or wife or both do not want to change. They see the motions of sin in their spouse, and they may even see it in themselves, but they do not want to do what is necessary to allow God's transforming grace to revolutionize their lives in marriage. Let me take you back to the start of this teaching series on the radical Jesus so I can touch upon the allegorical story I gave of the deformed man.

Without telling the whole story again, I will summarize it for those who did not hear it in those opening lessons. The deformed man is really Jesus, whom the village people hated. The village people represent the world of men.

The village people were a deformed race of hunchbacks, and their outward deformities corresponded with the twisted sinful nature that defines the entire race of man. The perfections of the deformed man reproved the twistedness of the village people, and this is what literally happened with Jesus. His holy life reproved the sinful lives of the people, including the religious crowd.

The village people thought that the deformed man was actually deformed because they had never seen a perfect person before, and until Jesus came into our world, we had never seen a sinless person either. They hated the deformed man because his perfections revealed just how deformed they actually were. As a result, the village people thought that the only way the perfections of the deformed man would no longer torment them was to kill him, and the religious people of Christ actually did that to Jesus.

But the village people were wrong, just like the Pharisees and Romans were wrong. They could not silence Christ's voice no matter what they did. The truth had broken into our world, and there is absolutely no way of silencing that voice.

Just like the village people were outwardly twisted, prayerless people remain inwardly twisted. They are diametrically opposed to Christ because living without a life of prayer we cannot have God's divine power to change. What the village people needed most they refused to pursue, and those things that would cause them nothing but grief they passionately pursued.

Is this not the reality of the human race, and so often of you and me? God will not be our helper until we are willing to live a life of prayer, and to refuse to live a life of prayer is direct rebellion against God. So our prayerlessness keeps us from the only source of power from whence comes our true and eternal help. The very idea that people are prayerless proves that they do not love God, which in turn proves that they cannot be truly Christian.

Those who know and love Jesus want to be with him. When we let anything and everything keep us from seeking the face of God, then all those other things are idols of the heart and mind. Until we see our desperate need for a spiritual revolution, we will never seek God for that revolution.

Anything that keeps us from intimate fellowship with God is sin to us, no matter how good or seemingly innocent it may be in and of itself. Going to a garden is not evil in itself, but if it keeps you from being with Jesus, then it becomes sin to you. We must come to the point where we comprehend that Jesus is worth the passionate pursuit of our lives.

He deserves the reward of his suffering, which is the total surrender of our lives to him. It is not just that he changes our lives for the better while we are in this life, but what he offers us in the life to come far

outweighs any struggles, trials, or temptations we will face in wholeheartedly following him now. We need an eternal mindset, and a vibrant life of prayer and a love for God's word will be of tremendous help in seeking this out.

We need to move beyond the misconceived ideas that we often have about prayer and begin to grasp the truth that prayer is all about relationship. To me, this thought is astounding, that God wants me, that he wants me to spend time with him, and that he wants me to literally know him, as Paul said in Ephesians 3, verse 18, to know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses human knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God. This is far more than intellectual knowledge about God's love.

It is relational knowledge. It is the knowledge of God that satisfies the soul that hungers and thirsts for righteousness. The Lord is calling us to relationally know him and his love that surpasses human understanding so that we will obtain the astounding joy that is found through the passion and pursuit of God when it burns white-hot within us.

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