

How to Pray

by Paris Reidhead

Paris Reidhead's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and practicing different kinds of prayer to deepen one's relationship with God and grow in faith.

Duration: 34:59

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:1, Ephesians 6:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his own journey with prayer and the importance of studying the Word of God. He shares how he initially had a simplistic understanding of prayer as just asking and receiving, but later discovered the power of prayer through studying Ephesians 6:18. The speaker also discusses the consequences of sin in a Christian's life, including broken fellowship with God, hindered prayers, and vulnerability to Satan's attacks. He emphasizes the need for believers to engage in both petitionary prayer and thanksgiving, highlighting the importance of gratitude in our relationship with God.

Transcript

I decided once to find out what the word of God said about the Son. And I found out the key that really began to draw me into the word was a translation of Ephesians 6.18 by Trench. Trench had done a lot with church history in the early period of the church, the apostolic period of the church, and in giving this in one of his essays or articles, Mr. Trench said that you should translate Ephesians 6.18, if you'd like to turn to it, as it is now, praying with all prayer.

He said this is hardly meaningful. It ought to be rather praying with all kinds of prayer and supplication. Distinguishing, in a sense, between prayer and supplication.

Saying that this was always to be in the Spirit, and we should accompany it by watching thereunto with perseverance and supplication for all saints. So I seized on that expression, praying with all kinds of prayer, and decided that I would try to find out how many different kinds of prayer there were in the Bible. And that's what I want to share with you now, the different kinds of prayer.

Because I know you're not satisfied with your prayer life, and nor am I. You were asked, what is the primary goal of a Christian in a Christian's life? What would your answer be? It could be any of several. The one I most frequently hear is to win souls to Christ. Now this is a byproduct of the primary goal.

What is the primary goal? Have you thought of, pardon? To glorify God, to have fellowship with the Lord. Someone else had it. Praise him.

All right. Well, I would, just to help you at least share my thinking, I would put it this way, that the primary purpose in the Christian life is to grow in the grace and the knowledge and the likeness of Jesus Christ. We find that this being the case, or this I would support by the fact, that this is the purpose of his prayer in John 17.

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their words, that they all may be in union. As thou, Father, art in union with me, and I in union with thee, they may be in union with us, in order that the world may know that thou hast sent me. In order then it says I in them, thou in me, that they may be made perfect in union, in order that the world may be able to believe or know that thou hast loved me, as love them as thou hast loved me.

For this is the case, and what is the primary exercise by which we grow, or the primary emphasis in this growth process? How do we come into the grace and knowledge and likeness of Christ? Paul said he labored night and day, from house to house, that Christ might be formed in the people. And again he said he gave evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry, and to the building up of the body of Christ until we all come into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ unto a mature man, that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine. If you had asked the Apostle Paul what his primary purpose was in his ministry, he would not have said, to win souls to Christ, he would have said that I might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus, mature.

Now does this mean that there is lack of concern on the part of God for evangelism? No, not at all. After all, he did say, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. And he did say, go ye therefore and teach and make disciples.

He did say that, but he also said that his emphasis was on the relationship of the individual to the Lord. Now I am asking this question, by what means is this goal realized in your life? And you have had several answers that would be appropriate and correct. Probably the most effective answer would be in two parts.

One, to read the word and feed on the word, that the word might have recourse and be glorified in you. And the second would be that you should learn the art and the function of praying. Well, I have read a lot of books on prayer.

I have heard a lot of sermons on prayer. I have been to seminars, discussions, conferences where prayer was the theme. Everybody had nice things to say about prayer.

But if it is this important that it would be right there alongside feeding on the word and studying the word, then why is it that we have so much said about it and the benefits of it and so little practical instruction in how to pray? I remember reading a book, a very fine book, a very helpful book, with an aspect of truth. Prayer is asking and receiving. Well, it made a tremendous impact on me in the early years of my ministry and I actually felt that this rather well summarized what the Bible said about prayer.

Prayer is asking and receiving. And I recall as a young preacher in Little Falls, Minnesota, by the way, fellow Minnesotans, I was pastor of the First Baptist Church there back in the early 40s, and I decided that if this was that important, I have read, for instance, that Martin Luther prayed three hours a day and the

Reformation came. Well, that's great, you know.

What could I do? I didn't think I was quite cut off the same bolt of good he was and maybe I shouldn't start out with three hours a day, but I could work up to it. And so I decided one day I was going to spend two hours in prayer. And I came armed with a membership list, all the offices, teachers, Sunday school students who weren't members, missionary list, fellow pastors, the associational pastors, and I was going to do what I'd been taught.

Prayer was asking and receiving. I didn't want to get carried away, so I set my alarm that I had in the office for two hours because I figured that if I should go four or five hours that first day, that would be a hard-wrecking thing to live with. So I set it for two hours.

Well, I prayed for everybody in the church, all the members, all the officers, Sunday school teachers, everyone in Sunday school, all the pastors in the area. I prayed for all the missionaries, all the students I could recall from Bible Institute. I went around the world in all the mission fields.

I went up the longitudes and across the latitudes and circled the world again and again, remembering this one and bringing him in. My knees hurt. My back ached.

I was in mortal anguish. I thought I'd never survive, and I was sure the clock had stopped. And I looked.

It was 27 1/2 minutes, and I got up and shut off the alarm, and I said, well, Martin Luther was a better man than I am, and if that's what it takes for a reformation, then the Lord's going to have to find somebody else to bring it. Because this was the naive, oversimplified insight into prayer that it was asking and receiving. And then I, after years of saying nice things about prayer and doing very little of it, I decided once to find out what the word of God said about this subject.

And I found out the key that really began to draw me into the word was a translation of Ephesians 6.18 by Trench. Trench had done a lot with church history in the early period of the church, the apostolic period of the church, and in giving this in one of his essays or articles, Mr. Trench said that you should translate Ephesians 6.18, if you'd like to turn to it, as it is now, praying with all prayer. He said this is hardly meaningful.

It ought to be rather praying with all kinds of prayer and supplication, distinguishing, in a sense, between prayer and supplication, saying that this was always to be in the spirit and we should accompany it by watching thereunto with perseverance and supplication for all saints. So I seized on that expression, praying with all kinds of prayer, and decided that I would try to find out how many different kinds of prayer there were in the Bible. And that's what I want to share with you now, the different kinds of prayer, because I know you're not satisfied with your prayer life, nor am I, for that matter, but I know that as I've been meditating on and studying the different kinds of prayer taught in the word of God and seeking to practice these kinds of prayer, that my life has been immeasurably enriched and I can only give with any meaning or effectiveness that which has had some meaning in my own heart and life.

So in the first place, the Christian life begins with prayer. You would, of course, immediately recognize that I am referring to, for instance, that prayer of the publican down in the temple, God be merciful to me, a sinner. Your relationship to Christ had its beginning in much the same way.

Many, perhaps, were the influences in your life that brought you to that point, but at some time, somewhere, all that you'd been taught, all that you'd learned, all that you felt came to focus in that

communication that you made, God be merciful to me, a sinner. Then you added, I'm sure, and saved me for Jesus. It was a commitment.

It was an act of faith. It was a reception. Now, this, of course, beginning the Christian life in prayer ought to indicate that it would be continued in prayer, that every effort in our life would be on the basis of prayer, every success would be a prayer success, every failure would be a prayer failure.

But having done that, having started in this relationship with Christ through prayer, the prayer of faith that savingly unites us to the Son of God, it's then not the focus of most teaching effort in our behalf. Most of the time that people are instructing us at that point is not to help us to become more effective in prayer. It should.

So what happens after that? What would be the next step in prayer? Well, last Saturday you first trusted in Christ and first prayed this prayer that savingly united you to him, and you had God's witness to your heart that you had been born into the family of God. The thing you ought to pray the next day and thereafter is the prayer of affirmation to affirm what you did. Well, what did you do if you have savingly received Christ? Well, of course you renounce sin.

Well, what is sin? Well, sin is the committal of the will to the principle and the policy of pleasing yourself as the end of your being. And if your prayer that you prayed in receiving Christ was effectual in bringing you into a relationship to him, then it was preceded by repentance. Well, what's repentance? Well, that's the change of mind or purpose from living to please yourself to living to please Jesus Christ.

What kind of a prayer, God be merciful, save me for Jesus' sake? Yes, this is perhaps all that you need to pray as long as you understand what's involved in it. The crime of sin is that we have turned everyone to our own way. The essence of sin is I'll do what I want to do.

I'll be God in my life. And one could repeat the prayer of the Republican constantly for days, weeks, months, years, and still have no saving effect, not until he's repented. Christ said, except you repent, you'll perish.

Well, to repent, I say, is to change your mind from what it was to what it ought to be. Well, what is the mind of the sinner? Well, I'll do what I want to do. I'll decide how to be happy.

It's the mind attitude expressed by the Jews when Pilate presented Christ. We will not have this man to rule over us. It was the attitude of Saul of Tarsus who was convinced that Jesus Christ was an imposter and the best thing he could do for his people was to eradicate the very memory of Christ from the mind of his people.

And yet he met Jesus Christ. He was convinced that he was God. And so his response was, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Now, he did not pray the Republican prayer in words, the same exact words, God be merciful to me, a sinner, and save me for Jesus' sake.

He simply said, who art thou, Lord? I am Jesus. What wilt thou have me to do? Implicit in this that he's relinquished all of the influence of his family, always there's a cost in family. Christ said in Luke 14, if any man hates not his father, mother, husband, wife, brethren, and sisters here in his own life, he can't be my disciple.

My lordship transcends the right to all human relationships. Then he says, if anyone doesn't take up his cross, he can't be my disciple. And consequently, there is in this expression, take up your cross, a relinquishing of the right to decide your career.

You've said, I'll decide how to use my time, my talent, my energy, my experience, my connection. I'll make my own plans. Saul of Tarsus had his plans, complete and effective, being rapidly on the way to being fulfilled.

But when he met Jesus Christ, he realized that he'd made all of his plans without taking Christ into consideration. And when Christ said, if any man doesn't take up his cross and come follow me, he can't be my disciple, he was merely saying, because I am God, my lordship transcends the right to all the plans you've made on your own. And so when Paul said, Lord, what will thou have me to do? He said, why, all my plans, Lord.

What will you have me to do? I've made my own, but from here on, what will you have me to do? Then Christ said in Luke 14 again, so he that does not forsake all that he has, he can't be my disciple. What is this? Well, you have, as an individual, deciding how to please yourself, you have a perfect right to decide what you do with your money, for instance, and your ability to make it, and your possessions. Paul undoubtedly had a good income, he had a prospect of a very, very munificent inheritance, and now he's meeting Jesus Christ.

His family are going to turn against him, his career is going to change, he loses his job, and all of his possessions that he has will be released. He can never say, my, in a proprietary sense again. And he realizes this.

My Jesus, my Lord, what will thou have me to do? Well, that's implicit in repentance. And if you have something more than just an intellectual perception of the plan of salvation, if you know Jesus Christ, then whether you've ever heard the words I'm using or not is inconsequential. This is what's happened.

No, when you then begin this set time of prayer, it's well for you to remind yourself what your crime was. For instance, oh God, before I met thy lovely son, I lived to please myself, I decided how to rule my life, I was governed by the pleasure of my family, and I was ruled by the plans that I had made, and I counted all my possessions as mine. But now I've met you.

And that day that I met you, I relinquished the right to my right, the prayer of affirmation. What does this do? That brings all of the merit of the past, all of the vital and dynamic decisions of the past up to the present. Not asking for anything.

Merely refreshing your mind as you affirm to God those transactions you've had with Him. And it's a very important aspect of prayer, neglected by most Christians. The past for most is the past.

And they only remember the unpleasant things or are amused by them, as the case might be. But for that believer who wants to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and who realizes that God and His sovereignty is working to conform us to the image of His Son, then remembers that he has a very short memory. And so when he goes to God in prayer, he brings these things of the past into focus again.

And he revitalizes them by telling God what his decisions were, by affirming what his purpose was. For instance, when a soldier, a young man, is inducted into the armed forces, he has to pledge allegiance to the flag. Yes, but every morning they route him out of a warm bed and get him out on the parade grounds

to do the same thing.

Well, why? So that he can be conditioned to the point that he realizes that every day he lives, he lives under the control of his government represented by the flag. So it ought to be with you in your daily worship that you're reaching into the past and finding all of those transactions that have had, and bringing them. It doesn't take a long time.

But it is very, very effective. It's spiritual nutrition to remind yourself of the pit from which you've been digged and who brought you from it. And of the purpose you made then to please God.

And all the decisions of yesterday that have had effect on you. And you bring them all back into this focus. This is terribly important for us.

So the prayer of the saving reunites us to Christ. And then the prayer of affirmation, extended in your own mind and spirit, as you hear me speak of it now. Then the next kind of prayer that I have found very, very important is the prayer of confession.

The prayer of confession. I've been in, lived in some parts of the country where they had the annual revival meeting. Or the semi-annual revival meeting.

And it was amazing that in that situation the people would have a week or two of emphasis. And what would be my experience, well I've conducted many of these, would be to find that the people were confessing the same sins year after year. And it was so, some groups have confession every Saturday for instance.

And others have it twice a year or once a year, every two years. But in many times it would be the same sins they were confessing. Now does the Bible teach confession? Oh indeed it does, indeed it does.

But what does it teach? Instantaneous settling of accounts with God. Instantaneously dealing with that which grieves God. So the prayer of confession is to be on two levels.

One, the very moment that you are aware that you've grieved God, or a person, or in any way have offended him whose name is holy. The wise course is to deal with it at that point. I remember years ago in Africa as a missionary, the head of the station asked me to help demolish a garage.

We had all of our buildings built on cotton soil. Once I put a long bamboo pole down about ten feet into the ground and threaded it right through, we didn't know it was at least that deep. A man dug a well and had black soil for 75 feet.

He never found any gravel or sand. Right along the banks of the Nile River. Now this would destroy our buildings.

We'd build on this soil and then it would dry and just crack them to pieces. And they had to demolish this garage. You knew it had been stored from wood.

One beam was about a four by twelve. A long heavy beam that had been used for some purpose. And there was a cleat, a two by six cleat nailed onto it that had been split.

Well we were supposed to pull that out. There was bricks on it and debris. I said to the boys, now get a hold and pull.

And it didn't come. So I took the hold at the end of this two by six and put my considerable weight with theirs and the result was it broke loose and when it did, the point of that hit my knee and broke the skin. Now I had signed a promise when I came to the field that I would deal with any break in the skin so seriously as to immediately stop and cover it and disinfect it because we knew that the flies carried a virulent infection that would cause tropical ulcers.

But I was far too busy demolishing this garage. You see, I couldn't go a hundred and fifty feet to our house and get a band-aid and take care of it. No, now I was needed.

So I tied my handkerchief around it and you know how soon it was down around my ankle. And then I broke off a branch of a tree that had brushed the fly and you know how soon I dropped that. And so I looked and well, it was dried so far.

So that night I washed it and put a little drop of powder in it and it was healed up. But three days later there was a little rise. And so I opened it and washed it off with some oil and about four days later a medical official from the Sudan Medical Service came in and he said, listen, if you don't get off that knee you're going to lose that use of it.

So for about five days my whole work was to sit there with my leg up syringing this to shrink the tissue so that all the infected trips could heal from the bottom up. All because I've been too busy to deal with it. And I think that this is an illustration of what happens when we fail to deal with sin.

There's five terrifying effects of sin in the Christian's life. It breaks fellowship with God. It keeps our prayers from being hindered.

It keeps God from using us. It exposes us to the ravaging attacks of Satan. And it makes it necessary for God either to disown us or to rip us.

To shake us. So what is the answer? What's the alternative? Well, it's to instantly deal with anything that we see. The prayer of confession.

So as you go to prayer in this set period this private time alone with your wonderful Lord you ought to just go right, just go to the mirror of the word and let the Spirit of God go through your heart and deal with anything and everything that He shows you that grieves Him. There's been a revival out in Kenya and Uganda for loathies over thirty years. Forty years.

I had dinner with Pastor Gevindri a while ago on his way through and he was telling me how this had begun and how God had blessed it and how it's continued. And what's been the secret of it? Short accounts with God. Instantaneously dealing with anything that grieves God.

So the prayer that savingly unites us to Christ. The prayer of affirmation. The prayer of confession.

Well, we could take much longer on each of these but we come to the next one. And this is greatly neglected. Now we've spent quite a bit of time in prayer already, haven't we? With the affirmation.

Going back to the past and reminding ourselves of the transactions with God and then this dealing with everything in mind and heart and purpose opening ourselves to Him. We haven't asked God for anything yet, have we? Well, the next thing is the prayer of thanksgiving. The prayer of thanksgiving.

Now very few people, I'm afraid, from what I can see in literature on the subject understand that there is a distinct difference between the prayer of thanksgiving and the prayer of praise. Because they occur in the same verse does not mean that they're the same thing. It's a necessary synonym.

Let me give you the difference that I see. Thanksgiving is gratitude to God for what He has done. And praise is adoration of God because He is who He is.

You will praise God regardless of what He does because He's worthy of praise. You will thank Him for what He has done. Now unless we confuse these two we do neither at all.

We should distinguish between things that differ. We eat with knife, fork, and spoon but we don't do the same thing with each piece. And we have to learn whether there's the appropriate use of these instruments for eating just as we have to learn whether the appropriate tool for the instrument for praying.

And there's the tool of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving, what is it? Well, how many things are we to be thankful for? Well, how many of you know 1 Thessalonians 5:18? You can quote it. Well, I thank you, one.

The rest of you, I thank two. How many? Let's see your hands. 1 Thessalonians 3. Any others? Because this may cost you money.

Four. If it costs you money, how many of you know it? All right, five. Out of this group, five.

Well, I didn't make any charge for this service but I don't like to waste my time. So I think it would only be fair that if at any time after today I meet you and point my finger under your nose and say 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and you can't give it to me, I ought to be entitled to send you a bill for \$25 for professional services. Would you think so? I think that would be fair.

If it's important enough for me to come and tell you, it's important enough for you to learn it because it's for your spiritual health that you might grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. And again I say, I don't like to waste my time. I like to sow seed on good soil.

What is it? Well, here it is. I was up in Lake Roscoe in Canada back in 1955. First time I went to this, the Christian Missionary Alliance conference called Glen Rocks in Canada.

And I was there and the first night I was there I noticed this man. He looked like the sum of all the suffering and sorrow of the whole world. It all settled on him.

He had a face that was so sad that if he turned it on a sunny day it would cloud up and rain. I've never seen a man that embodied so much misery. He just looked like the epitome of it all.

And I said, who is that man? Oh, that's Dr. Murray Finley, a dentist in Toronto. I said, he is certainly sad. He said, yes he is.

He is sad indeed. I said, I hope you'll talk to him. Oh, no.

I said, you pray that if God wants me to be the instrument of helping him that he'll come to me. Will you do that? And so Dr. Bailey said, yes I will. And the Thursday night, he said, could I see you tomorrow? I went to his home and I said, well, tell me about it.

What's happened? And he started in. Later on he'd gone to this church and now the pastor had disappointed him. Then he went to another church.

A lot of people being converted but the same few always carrying the load. He went to another, loaned some money to a brother who wanted to start a business and when the business failed he said, well, it's an investor's risk and I don't owe you anything. And so he said, I was disappointed in the pastor and discouraged in the church and disillusioned with my brother and I was depressed about it all and said, so I've just been defeated.

Well, he didn't know it but he actually used my five deadly deeds. You know what they are? Well, here they are. Disappointment, discouragement, disillusionment, depression, and defeat.

Disappointment is a mortal sin. It will destroy spiritual figure and health perhaps more than any other thing. No Christian ever has the right to be disappointed about anything.

I looked at Mary. I said, you know, Doctor, if I can prove to you that you're in this condition because of sin will you deal with it? Oh, I've been searching my heart. I said, that's all I ask.

If I can prove that you're in this condition because of sin, will you deal with it? Yes, he said, but I know it's not. I said, that's my responsibility, isn't it? I said, do you believe that to not do the will of God is sin? Oh, yes. I said, Murray, do you know 1 Thessalonians 5.18? Now, he's a Scotsman and so am I. And he said, no, give me the first word.

I said, I won't give you anything. You'll got to get it for yourself. And he said, do you know it? He said, no.

I said, do you charge patients when you pull their teeth? He said, yes. I said, well, I'm not charging you but from today on, whenever I see you, if I put my finger under your nose and say 1 Thessalonians 5.18 and you can't give it to me, I'll send you a bill for \$50 for professional services every time you say it. And I knew that would get to him.

And I explained to him. He said, you mean that? I said, I mean it. And so, I explained to him what his sin was that he had not given thanks.

He said, so you think I can give thanks for a pastor that... I said, let's read it again. In everything except thanks, give thanks except when a pastor disappoints you. He said, I don't even thank God.

I said, you talk to God about it. I didn't write the Bible. He said, you think I can give thanks for somebody that cheats me? I said, in everything except when somebody... I said, look, don't argue with me, Murray.

Don't argue with me. I just preached the word. I didn't write it.

He said, I can't be a hypocrite. I said, you're better. If you're going to get me around this, you're going to have... He said, what do you mean? I said, you've got to get down before God and grit your teeth and say, oh God, I don't understand why you do anything like this and say anything like this.

But you said give thanks, and I'm an hypocrite. But I said, start here, and then God will meet you. Well, the next summer I was back.

We were playing golf, looking down that beautiful green course towards a blue lake, Vostoka, and the fields beyond it. Murray was there. He just made a good shot, and he stopped, and he stopped.

I said, isn't it wonderful to be alive? And I reached over, and I said, First Thessalonians 5:18. In everything you thank. Well, it's time to quit.

You got your money's worth anyway. I'll finish it some other time. Father, we thank you and praise you for it.

Time together. There are so many different kinds of prayer, and thou wouldst have us become experts in them all. And we would ask thee, Father, that these that we've learned, perhaps there's someone here today that's never savingly embraced thy dear son, never prayed that simple prayer that'll enable him to pass from death to life.

Oh, might it be so. And then, Father, for all of us, might we learn what it is to affirm again all thy grace, thy mercy, thy love toward us in awakening us, in bringing us to conviction, to repentance, to faith, in causing us to renounce sin, the right to rule our lives, to embrace thy son. Teach us what it is to affirm all the transactions we've made with thee until they regain their vitality and their strength and their dynamic in our daily life as well.

And then, Father, teach us what it is to keep short accounts with thee, to keep a conscience void of offense toward thee and toward others. Grant our God that our lives might acquire that health and that beauty that will remind others who meet us that we've somehow been with thee. Thank you for everyone present.

We're asking now, bless our brother Chase and each one that makes this class part of his spiritual fellowship and nourishment. Bless him in the services that have been treated him throughout the day. We ask thee for it always, Jesus.

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