

## What Is Prayer?

### Definition of Prayer

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Just very briefly, I want to give a quick rundown of the subject material of the last four sermons. Every one of them have been on prayer. The first one involved faith in prayer. The second one involved fervency and prayer. The third one involved seeking God and prayer. The fourth one involved persistence and prayer. Maybe this seems a little bit late, but the subject today is going to be, "What is prayer?"

Prayer is a tool. As in life, it is almost impossible to do many things without tools because the job has to be put together by tools that are designed to do the job. There are some tools that almost anybody can use with a certain degree of proficiency. One of those happens to be prayer. Anybody can pray. We should be able to do that. It ought to be something that comes naturally. But to be able to pray effectively, proficiently, in the way that God wants us to pray, is going to be something that is going to require, let us say, a bit of training, a bit of skill, a bit of understanding as to what it is that God wants.

There are some tools that require a great deal of training to use them skillfully. I do not believe that prayer is really one of these that requires a great deal of training to do skillfully because in one sense a very effective prayer can be made by a person with no training at all. It is just a heartfelt response to a need that he has.

Those kind of prayers are, in one sense, few and far between. Most of the prayers that we make to God are not those kind, because maybe the situation does not demand that it be as urgent or heartfelt as most of the prayers that we are going to be making.

How one will use this tool is very frequently determined by the degree of one's success in life. When one is employed by an employer, the employer and the employee usually share in providing the tools for the job. And I would say as a general rule the employer supplies those tools that are larger

and more expensive and the employee the ones that are personal, smaller, less expensive.

God is our employer. We are in a work. And God's work is perfecting holiness of heart and life in us. He is reproducing Himself. His work is not just to get us saved. If all He wanted to do was get us saved, all we would have to do is go through the process of repentance, the receiving of His Spirit, and that would be the end of it. He could waft us off to heaven and that would be it.

He does not do it that way, does He? He leaves us on earth and we have to live out the remainder of our life. And it is a life of overcoming and growth and it has an end in mind. That object toward which the remainder of our life is lived is becoming holy as He is holy.

His work is not simply to preach the Gospel. That is only a tiny part of the work that He is doing. In order for one to do that effectively, one has to be becoming perfected in holiness.

Let us begin here in I Peter 1.

**I Peter 1:15-16** but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written [Here is the reason to be holy], "Be holy, for I am holy."

God is God. God is holy. We are to become God. We are to become holy. That is the emphasis in our lives from this point on. Our life is not a means of merely being saved but rather our life is to be pointed toward becoming holy.

Mankind is a perverse creature. We are full of all kinds of sinful desires and wicked inclinations. If we were not that way, why would God say, "become holy"? We have to begin with the knowledge that we are perverse.

We are so perverse that God's own record against us says that our "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." It means incurably wicked. "Who can know it?" He says. God knows it, but do we know it? Not as well as we need to know it.

He tells us in another place, "they [meaning us] go astray as soon as we are born, speaking lies." It comes right out of that deceitful heart. The Bible shows us that we are this way largely because of communication and fellowship with Satan. We do not, of course, realize that this is taking place. But nonetheless the Bible tells us that for this purpose the Son of God is manifested that He might destroy the works of the Devil.

The work of the Devil in you and me is the implantation of *his* nature in us. This is why we are deceitful. This is why we go astray as soon as we are born. This is why the earth is filled with violence. This is why we have to become converted. This is why God's purpose is that we become holy. Transformation is taking place. It is underway in our lives.

Hold your finger in I Peter 1 because we are going to come back to it. In Hebrews 12, Paul writes,

**Hebrews 12:14** Pursue peace with all men, and holiness. . .

We are to pursue peace and holiness. We are to pursue peace because there is no peace. There is no peace because of this communication we have had with Satan. We are reflecting his nature and the earth is filled with violence. So there is not peace. It has to be pursued after. And we have to pursue after holiness.

**Hebrews 12:14** . . .without which no one will see the LORD.

Those are some pretty strong words. The work of God on earth is to produce holiness in His children. Without that holiness being in us, no one will see the LORD. Flip back a few more pages to II Corinthians 7.

**II Corinthians 7:1** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness. . .

That gives us some sort of an idea of what holiness is. It is the opposite of the filthiness of the flesh and spirit. It is a transcendent cleanliness. It is a transcendent purity of heart and spirit. It is what God is. God *is* transcendent.

He is otherly. There is no one like Him. Yet He wants all to be like Him. Life becomes a journey toward holiness.

The reproducing process is told of, again, back in I Peter.

**I Peter 1:16-17** because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, . . .

This journey toward holiness is going to be hard work. It is going to require work.

**I Peter 1:17** . . .conduct yourselves [meaning, our behavior] throughout the time of your stay here in fear.

The reproductive process is not solely God's work in us, because we also play a major role in what is going on. The work of God in this world is the implantation of His Spirit in us, which gives to us the barest elements of the divine nature and then the growth and perfection of holiness in His people. We are in a work of transformation, of conversion, unto holiness.

It is right here that prayer fits back into the picture because verse 17 says, "and if you call on the Father." That is prayer. Prayer is an integral part of the obtaining of, achieving of, implantation of, transformation of—from the glory of man to the glory of God. Prayer fits right into the scheme of things.

God's purpose requires a great deal of fellowship with Him. For the sermonette here in Atlanta today, we had one of Mr. Armstrong's radio broadcasts. In that broadcast, which was on the book of Hebrews, Mr. Armstrong says (I am paraphrasing), "You need to be in contact with God every hour!"

God's Word says to pray without ceasing. Another place it says continually. God's purpose, as it is being worked out, requires a great deal of fellowship with Him.

This is understandable if we consider that before conversion we were largely the product of our fellowship before that time. I already mentioned the

fellowship that we had with Satan. We do not know it is going on, but he is nonetheless communicating with us and we receive his spirit.

Let us take it one step beyond that. That is, we are like our peers and our peers are like us. A peer is an equal. We are like those people that are equal to us. That is why they are our peers.

Let us rephrase that into a very common cliché, "Birds of a feather flock together." People with like minds tend to seek out each other. While they are together, they tend to shape one another's minds as well. Each individual is shaped by his associates. And the associates are also shaped by you and also by the other peers with whom they fellowship. This is a biblical principle.

Let us go back to another well-known scripture in I Corinthians 15. Paul writes,

**I Corinthians 15:33** Do not be deceived: "Evil company [those with whom we associate] corrupts good habits."

The old King James says, "evil communication." Talking about those people with whom we associate, those with whom we fellowship. Paul is saying we tend to take on the character of the group with which we associate. Specifically, he is saying that if we associate with people of bad character they are going to succeed in pulling us down to their level.

It is not likely that we will succeed in pulling them up. It is much easier to go down than it is to go up, especially if those with whom you keep company have no reason to go up. They are comfortable at the level at which they are at the time.

**I Corinthians 15:34** Awake to righteousness, and do not sin [the implication is that because of their fellowship, their association, with evil company that they were becoming involved in sin.]; for some do not have the knowledge of God. . .

He is seemingly implying that the people with whom the Corinthians were fellowshiping did not have the knowledge of God, and the Corinthians were being pulled down to their level. Paul is saying in effect, "Break it off with

those people. Get away from them. They are pulling you down. Repent." He says,

**I Corinthians 15:34** . . . I speak this to your shame.

I take it that the people to whom he was writing, that their friendships were primarily in the world. So he is advising these people to consciously choose better companions.

Can you see, at least in one sense, where I am leading? Could we possibly have a better companion than God? Could there possibly be a better fellowship than with God? Of course not.

Let us go to another scripture, this time in the book of Proverbs.

**Proverbs 27:17** As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

This is another indication from the Scripture that when we are in the companionship and the fellowship of others, we tend to shape each other. Another way of putting it is that we rub off on each other.

I think an illustration of this that is so clear is in our relationship with our children. When a child is born, they are not born with the inflections or the twangs of the area into which they are born. Nobody has to teach anybody how to speak "Brooklynese"—where you are talking through your nose. Nobody has to teach a child "Southern." The drawl just rubs off. The child picks it up. It is something that is ingrained within him unconsciously.

The same principle is at work in terms of character, in terms of personality. We rub off on each other. Are we rubbing off on each other for good? Or are we rubbing off on each other for bad? Are we lifting one another? Or are we pulling one another down?

We do not have to consciously try to do either. It will just happen. The world, largely, does not care how it rubs off on people—except that human nature wants people to think well of it, even while it is doing evil.

But in our fellowship, brethren, we have the responsibility to God to *work* to rub off on each other for good. Like I said before, we do not have to consciously do this. As long as we are conducting ourselves aright, it will rub off in the right way.

In other words, all we have to do is work on ourselves. If we work on ourselves, then the projection of the self, the spirit that will be going out from us, will be right. And it will have the right kind of impact.

God intends that prayer be an act of a free moral agent who consciously chooses to fellowship with God for the development of their relationship and the completion of his purpose.

I may have seemed to have gone about this in a round-about way to reach this point. But do you ever think consciously that when you pray you are in the presence of God and He has the opportunity to rub off on you?

That seems so simple—to be almost unbelievable, but it is right. When we pray, we are in His presence and He has the opportunity to rub off on us. Some of His Spirit reaches out from Him and begins to affect us for good. Prayer is a **major** tool in this development. It plays a major role in God's rubbing off on us. And all the while this is going on, our mind is being shaped by Him because we are in His presence.

Just a couple of chapters earlier in Proverbs 23, verse 7,

**Proverbs 23:7** For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you.

In one sense, what we are cannot be hidden. This proverb was written to give caution to a person so that he would understand that people can be two-faced, play the role of an actor, a hypocrite. The words coming out of the mouth may be far different from what the heart really is. You see, the heart cannot really be hidden. That is one good thing that we can understand, and protect ourselves in that way.

**Matthew 12:34** For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Let us apply this to God. What are your prayers to God like? What comes pouring out of us is our heart. Either that, or God's Word is not true. What we *are* is revealed to God by what we say to Him in our prayer. We cannot hide it. We cannot be two-faced with Him. What comes out of our mouth in our prayers to Him reveals to Him what is in our heart. Because He is the one that inspired that, "For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks."

Prayer is speaking to God. It is what comes out of our heart. And even as that proverb that Jesus gave there is directed at men, it is also true in relationship to God. What we are comes out.

God wants His will done in every aspect of our life. He wants our prayer to be according to His will. When we ask things according to His will, they stand the very best to be answered positively.

Now, why? Because they are in effect His thoughts coming back to Him. It is a part of our heart now, and we are now putting a part of Him, that has now taken lodging in our hearts, right back at Him.

I do not mean to put this into the form of a magic formula of any kind, like you push a certain button and out comes the desired thing. I am talking here in reference to prayer—saying God's words back to Him. The reason those prayers have the best chance of being answered positively is because it pleases God to see His children develop in His image. He then responds out of His love, even as we would to a child who pleases us.

Prayer at its simplest might be defined as talking to God. Or we might say that it is one side of a conversation. Light conversation that we have with humans takes on many forms and expresses a very wide variety of emotions.

Let us go back into the New Testament once again—this time into I Timothy chapter 2, verse 1. And we will also go into I Timothy 4, verse 5.



**I Timothy 2:1** Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.

**I Timothy 4:5** for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The word that is translated "intercession" in chapter 2, verse 1, is exactly the same one that is translated "prayer" in chapter 4, verse 5. This word has a very interesting etymology to it, and I think that etymology will instruct us quite a bit as to a very important aspect of prayer.

The word that you are looking at there is quite a long one in the Greek. It is *entugchanein*, all one word there. It is the verb form of this word. (We will get to the noun form in just a little bit.)

This word began to appear in Greek writing centuries before Christ and it meant simply "to meet a person," as if you would meet them along the way somewhere. If you were walking and you were going in the same direction and you met them. So you fell in with them and walked with them for a certain distance or maybe all the way to where you were going and they were going. It simply began to mean, "to meet."

However, through the centuries, like English words (in fact like any language), the words tend to take on somewhat different meanings. That is what happened with this because eventually the word meant not just "to meet" but "to meet and converse." This is natural because usually if you fall in with somebody along the way you just do not ignore them, you begin to talk to them as well.

That is the way with this word. In the beginning it meant just "to meet." Then it began to be used "to converse with the person." Then again as time went by, it began to take on a different meaning. It began to mean "to have intimate fellowship with the person." So in its history it moved from merely to "meet" to "converse" to "have intimate fellowship with."

The word to this point is describing how to have a right approach to God. What it means in practical fact is that we are not conversing with God from a distance. We are so intimately associated with Him that we are His children.

It is an intimate Family relationship that this word is describing. God is not way off on the top of a mountain somewhere. Even as early as the book of Deuteronomy, He said, "The word is not far from you, it is in you!"

If we are going to have the right kind of fellowship and relationship with God in prayer, we have to understand that we are **right in His presence**. If we are going to look at this as humanly and physically, that is how He can rub off on us. We are right in His fellowship, right in His presence. He is not way off in the distance somewhere.

You can begin to fit other things into this and see how true the meaning of this word is, that when Christ did what He did—the veil of the Temple was torn—it meant that access to God was completely open to Him. We have this access to Him. He is not way off in the distance somewhere. We are right in His presence when we are talking to Him.

However, the word continued to change and it took on a somewhat different coloration. This shows up in the noun form of the word. It is *enteuxis*. This word means, "petition to a king." It can be used in the sense of coming or going. By that, I mean the king could use it if he was summoning you into his presence. On the other hand, you could use it if you were presenting something to the king.

You put the two of these together and what it means is that we have "intimate access to petition to the king." It is not merely that we have an intimate fellowship or interest to anybody at all, but we have **intimate access to the King**.

When we put the two of them together it means that we have both privilege and power in prayer. You have probably heard the phrase "prayer power." You have probably heard the cliché that "There is power in prayer." We are looking at where that concept comes from.

Because of having the privilege to come before the King in an intimate fellowship, we have access to the power. It is not that prayer itself is the power, but that we have access to the One that has the power.

Before we get any more deeply involved in this, I am going to make what may seem to be a little bit of a digression. Most of us have heard of Mark Twain. Mark Twain was agnostic. I think that he became that way because he was an unusually discerning man—discerning in terms of being able to look at human nature.

He could see that there were an awful lot of inconsistencies in human nature, but he did not have the answer as to why those inconsistencies were there. So he became agnostic. It was sort of like, "I'm not really sure if there is a God or not." His discernment into human nature came out in his writing. Probably the most famous of his writings is Huckleberry Finn in which there are some very poignant examinations of human nature.

He saw many [people] as being full of contradictions. He was especially critical of religion. He saw that there was a wide difference between what a man says and what a man does. Of course, he looked at this in terms of religion. He also saw that there was even a wider difference between what the Bible says and what men *preach* the Bible says.

One time in his career, he wrote a short story, most of which had to do with a prayer that he made up. He called it the "War Prayer." That was the title of it. After he was done writing it, he showed it to some friends. His friends were aghast at what he was implying in this. They were afraid that he would get stoned, hanged, or whatever by all of these religious people out there who would be offended by what he said, or what he was implying really; he did not say anything directly. He was simply implying.

Basically, what Twain said in this "War Prayer" was that there are actually two prayers in most prayers that people make to God. There is the one that is uttered. And there is the one that is unuttered. (Incidentally, Mark Twain compromised. He decided that he would not publish the "War Prayer" until after he was dead because then nobody could get at him. He said that only dead men can tell the truth in this world.)

Basically, his prayer was this: The nation was going to war (and I wonder if he had the Civil War in mind) and people in all of their finery were flocking to the churches. While they were in the church, the preacher stood up before all the congregation and he made this very impassioned and colorful plea to

God. He asked Him to grant victory to their side, to protect their handsome and brave young men, and to preserve all of their properties and whatever. He went on and on making this plea to God—that God would be on their side and grant them the victory.

As the preacher was nearing the end of the sonorous prayer, an elderly man with gray hair came striding out from somewhere in the congregation. He went up to the pulpit and he bumped the preacher unceremoniously aside and began to address the congregation, asking them, "Do you really want this prayer answered?"

Then, like Samuel did before the people, he cried aloud to the people and told them what their prayer was going to mean, even as Samuel told the people what their asking for a king was going to mean in reality. "Do you really want bodies blown to pieces? Do you want children to be orphaned? Do you want women to become widows? Do you want houses destroyed and burned? Do you want their farms burned down? Do you want them to have all hope cut off? Do you want their land to be filled with despair?"

"Do you want all of these terrible things?" He was saying, basically, "Whatever happened to the Golden Rule?" Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

You see what was happening in this prayer to God is that they were uttering what was really in their hearts. It was alright when they requested for **others** to be maimed and pained and filled with anxiety—as long as **they** were comfortable in their request for victory. Do you see the duplicity? Do you see the hypocrisy?

We have to be awfully careful what we ask God. As I have heard some say, He may give us what we ask and we will be sorry. I am going to show you a little later the mighty forces that might be unleashed when we ask God for things. There is a responsibility by God's people to ask of Him things that are according to His will.

Prayer, just as a tool, is to be used to accomplish a wide variety of things within God's purpose. It is to be used in regard to the things of this life. God does want us to be praying about this life. He wants us to be praying to Him

to supply the daily need. But it is also going to be used by Him primarily not for this life but for His purpose. His purpose is reproducing Himself. His purpose is in producing His holiness in us. His purpose is in preparing us for the World Tomorrow.

So be warned that His purpose is the one that is going to supercede our purpose whenever we make these prayers.

Let us put several scriptures together. First let us go to Romans 3.

**Romans 3:10-11** As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God."

That is a powerful statement. There is **NONE** who seeks after God. Wait a minute! People all over the world are seeking after a god to worship. Yet God says there is none that is seeking after Him. That is because, as we learned in that last sermon, they are not seeking God in the way the Bible instructs.

This world is so deceived by Satan that they do not even know what to look for. God has to be revealed. **Then** we can seek! Let us carry this forward one more step to I Corinthians 2:7-10.

**I Corinthians 2:7** But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.

**I Corinthians 2:10** But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Mystery (to an English-speaking person) means, "a puzzle that is difficult to solve." But in the Bible it does not mean "a puzzle difficult to solve," but it means "a secret impossible to penetrate." That is why it has to be revealed!

Let us put these two scriptures together—the one in Romans and the one here in I Corinthians 2. Not only must God be revealed, but God's purpose must also be revealed. And it is as a gift from God. It is a part of His grace.

Once He is revealed, and once His purpose is revealed, *then* we can really begin to look for Him and it. We can really begin to look into it. Let us go to Acts 15. This is in the midst of the council there in Jerusalem. James is speaking in verse 16, and he is quoting out of Amos. He said,

**Acts 15:16** "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up."

He is talking about the return of Christ. He is talking about the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth—that there is going to come a time that it will be here. And for what purpose?

**Acts 15:17** "So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things."

Did you notice "the Gentiles who are called by My name"? In order to be called by the name of God, you have to be a son of God. You have to be regenerated by His Spirit. You have to be part of His Family.

When we baptized Mr. Elder this morning, I said that he is being baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is immersed into the name. He becomes a part of the Family of God at baptism and the receiving of God's Spirit.

The Gentiles do not seek God until after He reveals Himself to them and they become converted. There it is right in the Book. You do not seek God until *after* He converts you.

Remember, this is within the context of prayer. Prayer has very much to do with seeking God. Remember we read that—in terms of holiness—back in I Peter 1. "If you call upon the Father. . ." Let us go back there again.

**I Peter 1:10-12** Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them [that is, the prophets] it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

Let us consider what it is saying here in verses 10-12 from the standpoint of the prophets who were looking into these things. The question I have is: *How* did they look into these things? *How* did they seek God? *How* did they search Him out?

I am going to show you an actual example. Let us go back to the book of Daniel:

**Daniel 9:1-3** In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD [given] through Jeremiah the prophet [What was Daniel looking into? He was looking into the Bible. He was looking into the writings of Jeremiah the prophet.], that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

How did he seek God? Prayer. By fasting, by study. The same things that we are telling you all the time. This is a major portion of seeking God—by looking into His Word. That is not the end of it because, as I explained to you from the book of Amos, "seek" in the biblical sense does not just mean "gaining an intellectual knowledge of" but the actual "turning to become like God."

The knowledge is of absolutely no use unless we become like God. That is why he says, "Seek God and live!" What good is it if we have the knowledge if we do not repent, if we do not turn to become like God? Then we do not live. Prayer plays a major role in this process.

He was seeking God's mind for the purpose of imitating, obeying, pleasing, being like Him, doing His will. If we would carry this through, we would find out in chapter 10 that another occasion came up in which he fasted for three weeks. You have to be pretty serious and fervent to do that! It also says in there that Daniel's words were heard from the very first day. He spent three weeks fasting and praying to understand the will of God.

That is how one comes to know God in the sense of perceiving things as He does. If one is doing those things, then we have every opportunity to pray according to His will. Because, we will pray His Word right back to Him—not the exact words, but in the sense.

Let us go back to the New Testament again, this time in Ephesians 6. If you are familiar with Ephesians the sixth chapter, you know that this is the one where we are told to take on the whole armor of God. Verse 18 says,

**Ephesians 6:18-19** praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.

Here prayer is seen in a different context than we have looked at up to this time. It is one that we tend to ignore when we are studying through this section. When we are in this section, the tendency is very strong to focus on the armor of God. We look at faith. We look at the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, shoeing our feet with the Gospel.

Where in the world does prayer fit into this? It has a very interesting position, I believe. When Paul says that we are to pray always, he is talking here about all kinds of occasions. He does not mean that we are to be praying constantly. But we are to be praying in all kinds of occasions.



There are public prayers, private prayers, family prayers, verbalized prayer, whispered prayers. There is meditating in prayer. All of these are covered in various places in the Bible.

The word "Spirit" here has the sense of the word "esprit." In French, we talk about *esprit de corps*, in the sense of "spiritedly, or fervency, or with energy and feeling." However, this *esprit de corps* thing is important in this regard. The French use it in the sense of having a common spirit because they are part of a group that they hold to be special and dear.

That is exactly what Paul is talking about here because he says, "with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints." It is an *esprit de corps* in regard to our fellowship with the saints, a special feeling of regard, of care, of concern—that they have special meaning for us, different from what other people have to us. This spirit, Paul intimates, arises from our fellowship.

He also talks here about being watchful. This begins to fit it right back into the context that preceded it. It means being vigilant. Is that not the way a soldier is supposed to be, one who is prepared with all the armor of God? A soldier is always on guard. He is always alert. He is always attentive to what is going on. He is the opposite of everything that is listless. Shall I say Laodicean, apathetic? All of this is in the context of prayer and in the context of taking on all the armor of God.

Is the apostle Paul saying that prayer is a weapon? No, he is not. He separates prayer away from the weapons part. He separates it away from being part of that by which we fight the battle. Yet it is still in the same context and there is a connection. I think that it is a very vital connection—one that needs to be explored a little bit.

What is this warfare he is talking about here? It is a warfare against wicked spirits in high places: demons, Satan. Think of a group, let us say a whole army, or if we want to cut it down to size, a division or a battalion, a squad, that is in war. They are well-equipped to fight the battle. In order to wage war though, at least for any period of time, does not that group have to be

constantly supplied with provisions in order to keep the fight up? If this group is not constantly supplied what it needs to fight the battle, very shortly the food is going to be gone, the ammunition is going to be gone.

I think Paul is using prayer here as a modern army would use its communication system with headquarters. It is through prayer that we are constantly supplied and re-supplied to fight the war. It is like the telephone in modern war. It is like the radio in modern war. They used to make signals with flags and with Morse code, with telegraphs and things like that.

In order for us to successfully fight the battle against Satan and his demons, God is telling us, we have to be constantly in touch with headquarters in order to be re-supplied with the spiritual strength to fight the battle.

Without prayer then, we would be like a group of men in a battle situation where we have the equipment to fight the battle but we do not use the communication equipment to receive support from headquarters. Thus we weaken ourselves considerably. Ultimately, we will cut ourselves off from the source of supply.

There is a great urgency in the biblical record about prayer because it is so vitally important to the success of God's purpose. Remember Jesus said that, "without Me you can do nothing." He said this in direct association to producing fruit *in* fellowship. If you will remember the section there in John 15, it begins with Him being the true vine and us being branches. It ends with Him telling them that we are His friends. It begins with attachment to Him and ends with a discussion on fellowship, on friendship. He says, because we are His friend, what does He do? He tells us everything.

Is the communication intended by God to be only one way? He tells us everything, and we tell Him nothing? No. Communication with a friend is two-ways, is it not? It goes in both directions. What I am getting at here is this: If you want to produce the fruit of God's Spirit, you better be talking to Him.

We have seen prayer in several different positions. In every case, it is a form of communication. It is expressed in the Bible in quite a wide variety of circumstances. The kind of circumstances that anyone would have in their relationships with other people.

I want you to turn to Psalm 55. We are just going to look briefly at two or three ways in which the word that God chooses to be translated into the English word "prayer" expresses the kind of situation that is going on within the context of the prayer. From that, we can then understand that God expects our prayers to be different. By that, I mean that they are not all given in exactly the same tone of voice.

Sometimes you may be in a very desperate situation. You literally cry out to God for help. Other times you might be calm and composed. At other times, you might be scared to death. At other times, you might not be scared but very excited. At other times you might be in the depths of depression. In each case, the tone and inflection of the prayer is going to shift from one to the other. God shows these things in the Psalms. And it is a shame that the English does not express the way the Hebrew and the Greek do.

**Psalm 55:17** Evening and morning and at noon I will pray [This is the word we are going to look at here just briefly.], and cry aloud, .

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It is the Hebrew word, phonetically, very similar to the English word "rib." It is spelled "R-I-B" just like Adam's rib, just like your rib-cage.

**Psalm 55:18-21** He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle [Remember that word (battle) relates directly to the word prayer and why God chose that Hebrew word here translated "pray."] that was against me [David was in a battle, and he chose to use a very significant Hebrew word.], for there were many against me. God will hear, and afflict them, even He who abides from of old. Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God. He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has broken his covenant. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart [Remember that proverb, "As a

man thinks in his heart, so is he"?]; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

This word *rib* indicates a feeling, an emotion. It can be used in a situation as soft as to merely complain. If a person makes a complaint, it is the Hebrew word *rib*. David was complaining in this prayer. But it also means, "to grapple with, wrangle, fight an adversary, strive, or contend as with a judge."

That tells you what the context of the prayer is. David was overwrought emotionally. He was angry in this prayer. He was in despair—because one that he considered to be a very good friend had stabbed him in the back. He had betrayed him, betrayed his trust. He was deeply hurt and angry. Have you ever gone to God deeply hurt and angry and there was an intensity in your words that was not there at other times?

Are you getting my point? That is, prayer is used in all occasions. It is not just something that you get down on your knees and you say something in rote to God, something formalized like, "Now I lay me down to sleep. . ." or "Our Father which art in heaven. . ." God intends that our talking to Him come out of the very depths of the situation we find ourselves in and that our emotional content in that prayer is going to vary from time to time. There are going to be times when we are downright angry and upset. We do not have to worry about being angry or upset before Him.

Let us go to another one here in Zechariah 7.

**Zechariah 7:2** when the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD.

**Zechariah 8:21-22** The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek [You see, you are seeking God in prayer.] the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also." Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.'

On all three of those occasions, the same word is used. Again, phonetically, the word is *halah*. In this case, it means, "to correct, to stroke one's faith." It

means, "to strive to please *verbally*." It could even mean, "by appearance" because once in a while the word is translated "supplicate," which generally means, "to bend low."

The attitude here is entirely different from what it was in Psalm 55. In this case, the people are trying to ingratiate themselves, to change the mind of one that they love, back toward them. That is why people are coming to Jerusalem. The One that they love is being appealed to. So it will be translated from time to time "supplicate," "besought," "entreat," or "make suit to."

This word is used in a wide variety of contexts, and in another context the same word will actually be translated "infirmity" or "sick." The person is in a state of weakness. Only in the one case, the weakness is a weakness of the flesh. In the other, it is a weakness of spirit. They feel that they are on the outs with God. They are begging for forgiveness and appealing to Him for His mercy.

There is one that I want to go into. And we will conclude the sermon, and this series, with this. Let us go to I Samuel. Consider that prayer is basically talking to God. The Bible clearly shows that God expects us to talk to Him in all kinds of circumstances and in all kinds of attitudes. But there is more to prayer than that. And there is a very serious and yet a very wonderful aspect to it.

**I Samuel 1:28** "Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD." So they worshiped the LORD there.

**I Samuel 2:1** And Hannah prayed and said: . . . .

It is that word "prayed" that appears there and I think that this is the most interesting one of all the words that are translated into the English "prayer" or "pray." It is the Hebrew, spelled phonetically, *palal*. It is pronounced as if it is "pawlal." It means, "to judge," "to judge mentally or officially." It can also be translated "to intercede," "entreat," "supplicate," "interpose," "umpire," or "mediate."

**I Samuel 2:25** If one man sins against another, God will judge him.

..

There is that word. God will *palal* him.

**I Samuel 2:25** . . . but if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?" Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them.

I should have looked this up, but I think the word "intercede" is also *palal*. It has much to do with a very important aspect of prayer. Prayer must include praise and thanksgiving. But in almost every prayer there is also a request. There is an entreaty, an appeal for something. And that something is a judgment, or requires a judgment from God. It either is a judgment or it requires a judgment.

Also contained within that appeal, or your request, is your own judgment—as to why your request should be granted. When we are very young, just kids, we go to our parents and say, "Give me this," or, "Give me that." When we get a little bit older, we might say, "Would you please give me this, or give me that?"

But as we continue to age, our parent's response will also probably change from, "Yes," "No," "Shut up," or, "Quit bugging me." To "Why? Why should I give you this?" Then, you, if you are the one requesting, you do what? You say, "Because." What kind of an answer is that? What kind of a reason is that?

Are you telling your parents they should grant you your request simply because you are you? That is pretty presumptuous. Is that not what we do to God so many times! We just go to Him with a request, and we say to Him, "Give me this," or "Give me that." And if God says, silently of course, "Why?" Then we silently say back, "Because I am who I am." That is pretty presumptuous.

Is God going to respond to something like that? He may out of His mercy from time to time, simply because we do not know any better. But do you not, as a parent, expect your children (as they begin to get older, as they

begin to mature) to begin to be able to give you back good reasons why you should grant them their request? Yes, you do. You expect it.

It is right here. Everyone of us knows from our past years—hearing sermons on prayers—that we are to grind our prayers up finely. This is *why* God wants our prayers ground up finely. You know that illustration comes from the grinding up of the incense powders that went on the incense altar in the old Tabernacle and the Temple. They were so finely ground up that it was like talcum powder, and twice a day it was put on the incense altar. The fragrance went up. It passed through the curtain between the two parts of the Temple. It was symbolically appearing before the throne. And we find in Revelation 5:8 this represents the prayers of the saints.

So God wants our prayers finely ground. But He wants your judgment as to *why* He should grant your request. You are supposed to be able to tick off to Him one reason after another *why*. He wants to see whether you are thinking along the same lines as He is—according to His will. He wants to see whether your perception of the circumstance is in agreement with His perception of the circumstance.

Remember I told you earlier that as we are praying, our mind is being shaped? A prayer is a judgment. It is your judgment as to why your request should be granted. You are bringing this petition before the great King. He has given us intimate access to Him so we better present Him with a good case. That word even meant, "to present a suit before." Just like you are a lawyer appealing to Him.

With this in mind, you ought to go back and study the Psalms, and see how David ticked things off one thing after the other. "God, you should give me this because, because, because, because, because, and therefore, because of this, this ought to be done."

It is no wonder David is going to be king under Christ. That man could think like God! It is no wonder that his thoughts filled the largest book in the Bible. It is no wonder that God said that he was a man after My own heart. David fed God's thoughts right back to Him, and they came in the form of judgments that he made about things.

That is how God forms our mind! We study His Word and we feed it back to Him. And so we look at a certain person's situation. We see that this person is sick. We can go to God with requests like, "God you ought to heal this person because first of all, God, you said that you would do it, it is your promise to do it. And God, as far as I know, this person is striving to keep your commandments and that is part of the condition. And, Great God, this person is really involved in this congregation and they serve it left and right, and they do all of these good things."

Do you know that is what Hezekiah said to God? He said, "God, extend my life." Why? He said, "All my life I have served you with my whole heart." He gave God a good reason why his life should be spared. So God added on fifteen years.

A prayer is a judgment. It is your judgment of why you are petitioning. In some cases, the reason for the judgment to be made in that way is going to be very obvious. You are in that situation where you are hanging upside down in the well by one foot. "God save me. I am hanging upside down in the well." That is pretty good judgment. It is pretty obvious that it is one that needs to be made. Sometimes it is obvious.

Now, you watch after you have prayed. You watch the events unfold. And you learn. If God answered it the way you asked, what a confidence builder that is that your judgment is right. If it does not quite come in the way that you asked, but it is answered, then you know that your judgment of the situation—though it was partially right—was not completely right.

Prayer becomes a tool to teach us how to judge. Because God is going to give the right answer every time. But we learn.

You read in the Bible and you find that these people attributed things to God. How did they know that? They were praying about the situations and they knew that God's involvement was in these historical situations that we are now reading about.

We could go through quite a number of these where this word *palal* fits. It is really interesting when this is considered in the light of I Corinthians 6 where Paul says we are going to judge angels. How can you judge if you do not



know how to judge? Does not Revelation 5:10 say that we are going to be kings? Does it not say that we are already in training to be a priest? What does a king do? He judges.

Prayer is a tool. It is a tool, one of whose major purposes is to teach us how to judge. It is your evaluation of circumstances, expressed to God in the form of reasoning, and usually containing a specific request based on your evaluation.

That is what a prayer is. It is not just talking to God. It is your judgment, your evaluation, of the circumstance, expressed to God in the form of reason and usually containing a request that you want supplied for yourself or for others. So when you finally break them up, your involvement increases; then in watching them being responded to by God, we learn to judge.