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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**How Should We Then Pray?**

**Acts 12:1-18**

**Prayer:** *Father God, I just again, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for the incredible gifts that you've given to us in this Christmas season. We think of the gift of your Son, we think of the gift of your word, and Lord, this morning we just want to understand a little bit more of both. And so we pray, Father, for your Holy Spirit, we pray that you would guide us, accompany us, be with us as we are again opening up your word and again we pray that you would give us the ability to make it of lasting value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have been looking, spending a great deal of time looking at the idea of prayer, and we've been looking primarily at the "why," and the "what" of prayer. The reason why we discovered is because we have the privilege and we have the responsibility of being a critical part of God's plan to advance his kingdom and to destroy the works of the enemy. God has chosen his image bearers, which is us, he has chosen his image bearers to have a vital role in bringing to ultimate justice the very enemy of our souls who

caused the very first human to fall in the garden. So the "why" of prayer is basically that we are at war and God sees our prayer as a vital part of his response to the enemy of our souls.

The "what" of prayer has to do with how prayer not only changes this world that we live in but it also changes us as well. We spoke of the circuit of prayer with God the Father going through God the Holy Spirit then through us, then through the Son, then back to the Father for a response. It is the Father in heaven who initiates all prayer, the Spirit translates those prayers, we participate by praying those prayers, the Son advocates for us on our behalf, and then the Father orchestrates a response to prayer, a response that will bring glory and honor to Christ. That's how God moves mountains on earth through prayer. That's how God moves the objects of our prayer. But more importantly, I also pointed out that God also uses prayer to move the subject of prayer, and that would be us. Prayer changes our hearts, it changes our minds, it changes our spirits as we pray. It is a means of changing virtually everything about me, whether it be physical or mental or spiritual, psychological or social and it changes it to line up with where the kingdom is going. I pointed out that God gives as the answer to prayer the most precious thing that any human being could ever possibly receive, and it's not health, it's not wealth, it's not success, it is the actual presence of Christ. We

discovered how that works in books like Nik Ripken's *The Insanity of God*. He interviewed hundreds of victims of persecution and he came up with an insight to answered prayer that few of us in the West really even understand. He interviewed 800 victims of persecution and he said he never met one person who asked that the persecution would stop. He said, "we never heard that request." And then he said, "Rather believers in persecution ask us to pray that they would be faithful and obedient through their persecution and suffering." Well the reason for that is that God's answer to prayer so oftentimes for people in persecution is his presence which is sweeter and more profoundly desirable than anything else that any other human being could ever experience. And if persecution is a means to receive that presence of God, well then they say so be it. We'll take it. That tells you something about how powerful God's presence is. Ripken's book details people undergoing horrific persecution and insisting it's a small price to pay for the gift that we have received and that gift is this intense connection to God's Holy Spirit. And God accompanying us through anything including persecution is all we really need. And God basically tells us that we can conquer virtually anything this world could ever send us as long as we know that God himself will walk us through it. I pointed out how Pastor Pomeroy in Texas is walking now, even now with great confidence and power through an experience that's way beyond our ability to even comprehend. This

is the pastor of the church in Texas, his daughter and much of his congregation was slaughtered just a few weeks ago, and yet his response is to tell anyone who would listen to simply lean on Christ when events your life go beyond your understanding. He said, "Whatever life brings you, lean on the Lord rather than your own understanding." Well, he's clearly experiencing the presence of Christ in unbelievably awful circumstances, and he's showing us exactly what God means when he says in the 23rd Psalm: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.* Pastor Pomeroy is living proof of the notion that you don't get boiling oil grace until you're thrown into boiling oil. But here's the really hard part for us not in boiling oil to understand. It's that the essence of that grace is a sense of God's presence and unless and until you experience that presence, you won't fully grasp how sufficient and how all encompassing it is.

Joni Eareckson has spent fifty years in a wheelchair paralyzed from the neck down due to a diving accident at age 16, and she has spent those fifty years glorifying God in that wheelchair and she speaks of how precious the presence of Christ in that wheelchair is. She says, "It sound incredible, but I would really rather be in this wheelchair knowing Jesus as I do than be on my feet without Him."

You know, she's recently recovered from breast cancer and she has severe scoliosis, she's in intense pain almost all of the time, and yet with the pain and paralysis she has experienced Jesus in a way that very few of us have. *World* magazine named her its Daniel of the year and said, "She's called suffering a form of sandblasting away her sin and drawing her closer to Christ." She says, 'My displaced hip and scoliosis are sheepdogs that constantly snap at my heels, driving my down the road to Calvary, where I die to the sins Jesus died for.' And she often feels Christ is closest when she's in pain. 'I don't know why, but it seems that God shows us the face of Jesus in those moments,' she says. 'And those who refuse to enter suffering, fearing there's nothing there but darkness -- they miss that.'" I mean this frail, broken in body woman who weighs under a hundred pounds has more courage and ability to face trials in her pinky than most of us have in our whole bodies. And I submit to you that much of her power and much of her strength has come to her through prayer. See, the object of her prayer -- and she admits this readily, the object of her prayer at first was healing. She was desperate for healing, and God said, "No." But the subject of her prayer was her own sense of who she was in Christ and God said resoundingly, "Yes." Joni knows how to pray. And this morning I want to look a little deeper into the "how" of prayer. I'm not talking so much this morning about technique, I'm not talking about anything other than attitude. The

key to praying successfully is not getting the right words or getting the right rhythm or the structure of prayer down. The key to praying successfully is what Joni demonstrates, it's having the right attitude as we go into prayer, and that's what I want to discuss this morning.

You see, when I was a youngster -- I was raised Roman Catholic. When I was a youngster, we were taught that the two greatest sins you could be guilty of were two polar opposites. They were the sins of presumption and despair. Presumption was this attitude in which you presumed on the grace of God, that somehow or other you saw yourself as worthy of heaven, whether it's because of your good deeds or because of your spiritual pride, it was a great and terrible sin. Despair was the opposite sin in which you abandoned all hope of ever being possibly able to be worthy of heaven. I mean we were taught that Judas hanging himself was a classic example of despair. Well, it's been many years since then and I've long since come to my understanding of the gospel that would be considered presumptuous by some, because I have absolute confidence that I'm going to heaven. I presume so not based whatsoever on any righteousness on my part but solely based on the righteousness of Christ and his death on the cross, having paid for my sins. By faith I have inherited Christ's righteousness instead of my sin and it is a done deal. I never will presume on my goodness as getting

me into heaven but I will always presume on the righteousness of Christ. By faith I now stand perfected, that is, God sees me now through the finished work of Christ and by that finished work he views me positionally as perfected even though I'm still a sinner saved by grace. Now despair, on the other hand, is this sinful attitude that elevates my sin to a level so high that not even the grace of God can touch it, and it is a grievous sin. It's a grievous sin because it tells God your Son's death was not enough, the cross was not enough, my sin is too great, God, for even your efforts, God, to pay for it. And when God says in *1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*, he is making a statement about his justice that we dare not undercut. God is saying he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. What God is doing is he's placing his justice on the line. He's basically saying the death of my Son paid the price of justice for you. To think that your sin somehow outdoes the justice of God is to diminish and denigrate Christ's sacrifice. You know, when someone says my sin is just too great for God, I would remind them just what it is they're claiming. They're claiming that Christ's death on the cross was not sufficient. And when it comes to prayer, I think that it's very helpful to see these two sinful attitudes, presumption and despair as the outside borders, as the spiritual no-man's land that no prayer should ever enter. Presumption in

prayer reduces prayer to something formulaic. It reduces God to the dispenser of magical gifts. As long as my formula's right, as long as I've lined up my ducks, I can manipulate God and make him do what I want. And that's the sin of presumptuous prayer. That's what James says: *You have not because you ask amiss to spend it on your passions.*

The other end of the spectrum of prayer is despair. I'm not worthy of answered prayer. That's one aspect of it. The other more insidious aspect of it is just one of doubt, it is prayerfully going through the motions while doubting the outcome. God says such an attitude renders prayer absolutely fruitless. *James 1:6* says: *The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.* See, I want you to see how incredibly important our attitude is toward prayer and how easy it is to fall into the sins of presumption or despair or doubt as we pray.

So where is the sweet spot in prayer? Where is the spot that lies midway between presumption and despair? Well, let me give you an example from scripture this morning. I want to look at the scripture for an example of how we are to approach prayer because the early church knew exactly where that sweet spot was. An



example I want to give you takes place in Acts in the 12th chapter, but first let me give you a little history to set the stage. By the time we get to Acts 12, the church is again, it's exploding in growth in Samaria and Antioch and all of the surrounding areas, but as the church grows, it starts meeting extreme persecution. Acts 12:1-2 says: *About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword.* James is one of the leaders of the church. He and his brother John were the sons of thunder who accompanied Jesus right from the very beginning and now Herod has him executed. Now there was a whole group of Herods and this particular Herod was a class A dirt bag, and for Herods, that's saying an awful lot. He had been a playboy of sorts. He had accrued many, many debts. He was even sent to prison for making some intemperate remarks about the Emperor Tiberias. And when Tiberias died, a childhood friend of Herod's began to rise to power, a fellow by the name of Caligula. Well, with his help, Herod became the ruler of Judea and Samaria and it was this Herod who attempted to reek havoc on the church by executing James. You got to remember Herod, Herod was still a Jew and even though he acted like a complete pagan, he still did whatever he could to ingratiate himself to his fellow Jews, and so killing James who was the leader of this new sect known as Christians, killing James with the sword was a terrific way of currying favor with the Jewish authorities. Apostates were

people who led people astray. They were to be killed by the sword and Herod saw to it that James got that exact fate, but he wasn't about to stop there. Verses 3 to 5 says: *And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.* So seeing what a great response he gets for killing James only emboldens Herod for more evil. He knew that killing Peter as well would make him a hero with the Jewish rulers, and so he has him arrested. The only reason he didn't kill him outright was because the feast of Unleavened Bread was taking place and so he has to wait. And so he puts Peter in jail chained between two prisoners with two extra guards keeping watch outside of his cell. I mean Peter was a prize, and Herod's not about to let him go. But what is key here is what we read in the very next verse, verse 5, it says: *So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.* We want to get at this question: What does earnest prayer consist of? It's important to know because we're soon going to see, the answer to this prayer was as spectacular as spectacular answers get. And what I want to get at is the attitude of the early church as it prayed desperately for Peter who was in the most dire of straits, because that is the attitude that inevitably leads to successful

prayer.

Well, first of all, we know, we know that the prayer was not presumptive because, as we'll soon see, the result of that prayer was a complete and total shock to the ones who were praying. I mean they hadn't set up some agenda, they had not determined ahead of time that this or that was the way God had to answer their prayers, they simply earnestly prayed. We also note that their prayer was not from doubt or despair because the scripture describes it as earnest prayer and as answered prayer and James has already told us that prayer based in doubt is not going to be answered. So the prayer didn't come from doubt and it didn't come from despair and it certainly did not come from presumption. In fact it came from exactly how James says it should come, from a certain knowledge that God is good, and even though things are looking incredibly grim and Peter's about to be executed, we won't presume, we won't doubt, we won't despair, we will just earnestly pray because our God is still in charge. We call that prayer joyful. I mean joy is how Joni Eareckson prays and joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit. Joy is clearly what infected the prayers of the early church as they prayed for Peter, and here's what joy is all about. My working definition has been this: Joy is a settled sense of contentment based on the knowledge that God is good and that he is in control. I recently came across what I

think is an even better definition by Kay Warren. She says this: "Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right and the determined choice to praise God in every situation." Warren lays out three words that are critical to understanding what joy is. She says, control, confidence, and choice. See, you experience the fruit of the Spirit known as joy when you fully realize, number one, that God is in complete control; number two, that you are fully confident that God is good all of the time; and number three, when you make a conscious choice to praise him regardless the circumstance.

The early church is facing a situation that seemed to preclude any idea of joy. I mean, the persecution has grown to an extremely intense level. Their leader James has been butchered by Herod and now he's arrested another one of their leaders, Peter, and he's destined for the very same fate and yet joy is what defined the church's prayer in the book of Acts. And here's how God answers the prayer. This is verses 6 to 10. It says: *Now when Herod was about to bring him out -- that's Peter, when Herod was about to bring Peter out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side*

*and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. I just want you to picture this. Peter is bound between two soldiers, he's awaiting his execution and he's sleeping like a baby. And suddenly three things happen, light begins to flood the cell, Peter gets struck by an angel and the chains simply fall off his hands. Verse 8, it says: And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. Now reading the text you get the impression that Peter is still in a daze and here's what I find so amazing. Here's what I find so touching in this story. Basically the angel has to slow down and he has to tell Peter how to get dressed. He says, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." Peter's apparently still in a fog. Apparently he needs even further instruction because he says to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. Again that explains it. Peter thinks this must be a dream. This must be a vision I'm having. Verse 10 says: When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. Again the angel has completed his task and having completed his task, he just disappears, and Peter finally comes out of his fog. Verse 11, it says: When Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I am sure that*

*the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting." They were expecting an execution, and what they got instead was a divine display of supernatural power, a proof that God was a good God and he was still in charge. And what follows is almost comical. Peter then goes to Mary's house where the saints had all gathered to pray and he knocks on the door, and it says, Rhoda a servant girl sees Peter and she just totally flips out, just leaves him outside, leaves him outside in her haste to tell everybody that this dead man walking, this Peter, he's standing outside the door. Verse 15 says: They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.*

Well, we know that the prayer of the saints was not presumptuous and how do we know? Because they were astounded at what God had done. See, they had presumed nothing. They only knew that God was in complete control and they were fully confident that God was good all of the time, and they had made a conscious choice to praise him in spite of the fact that their leader's execution had already been

scheduled. Well, the results left them stunned. Peter not only appears to them but he clearly has a mission as well. It says: *And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers."* Then he departed and went to another place. And what Peter was doing, basically he was turning the running over of the church to somebody new, to James. This was not James who was the son of Zebedee who had been killed by Herod, I mean, that was the James that had been offered up, sacrificed by Herod as a party favor to the ruling Jews who hated this new set of Christ worshipers known as Christians. Peter was turning over the running of Christ's church to a different James, to someone who had known Jesus his whole life but only had come to a recent saving knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah. This James that Peter is speaking of was the very same James who wrote the book of James. This was the James who was Jesus's physical half-brother, the one who told us of the dangers of praying with a bad attitude, who said in *James 1:6: The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.* Well, this James certainly had known his own unique form of presumption. See, he had known Jesus from infancy as his own brother. He had lived his whole life in the presence of God in the flesh and yet he had refused to believe. Scripture even records the low esteem that James and his brothers had for Jesus at the very height of his popularity. In *John 7:3-5*

it says: *So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works that you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world."* For not even his brothers believed in him. Well, all of that changes by the time we get to the book of Acts. James had apparently been visited by his divine stepbrother Jesus after the cross and that had changed everything. Paul describes the activities of the risen Christ, and in that description he says in *1 Corinthians 15:7: Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.* Shortly after we see James in prayer with the newly formed church in *Acts 1:14.* It says: *All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.* See it was Jesus's half brother James who assumed the leadership of the new church after the other James had been executed by Herod and it's Peter who is now handing over that leadership to him. This James knew presumption and he also knew the temptation to despair. I mean, he had undoubtedly known that temptation seeing the church he is now leading come under devastating times of persecution and trial where it seemed for all practical purposes that God was absent. And we know that he wrestled with doubt because he writes about it in the text we just read. See, no one understood better than James that doubt is this no man's land found somewhere between unbelief and belief and that



when it came to prayer, there was in fact a promise land that laid somewhere between presumption and despair. It was a place of absolute confidence instead of presumption, a place of absolute hope instead of despair, a place where doubt was foreign because regardless of how difficult and impossible things seemed to be, there was absolute certainty not of outcome, not of result, but simply of one joyful fact that rendered doubt powerless. The fact was that God is a good God, that he is still in charge, no matter what happens, and that even if they were to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, they needed to fear no evil because that God was going to accompany them.

But you know, God hadn't finished answering the church's prayer. Just to go back to where we were, Peter's under arrest, he's scheduled to be executed, the church prays, an angel comes, he breaks the chains, he puts the guards to sleep, he leads Peter out of prison and deposits him in the street and all of this infuriates Herod. Verse 18 says: *Now when the day came, there was no little disturbance among the soldiers over what had become of Peter. And after Herod searched for him and did not find him, he examined the sentries and ordered that they should be put to death. Then he went down from Judea to Caesarea and spent time there.* See it was at very least, we're not absolutely certain of how many it was but we know for certain the very least it was four soldiers and

possibly sixteen who were assigned specifically to guard Peter and make sure he didn't get away. Two of them were chained to him 24 hours a day. No problem for God whatsoever. Big problem for Herod. He leaves town, he's heading to Tyre and Sidon, he's deeply embarrassed, he's already executed the soldiers. Verse 20, it says: *Now Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon, and they came to him with one accord, and having persuaded Blastus, the king's chamberlain, they asked for peace, because their country depended on the king's country for food.* Just to back up a little bit, these folks had been quarreling for a good time with Herod and he had placed an embargo on their wheat supply and now he was going to address them. In verse 21 it says: *On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them.* Well the appointed day was at the end of August, it was right after the wheat harvest and there was usually a celebration. In this case every five years they had a celebration in order to celebrate Caesar and it was an Olympics type event. And so Herod puts on his royal robes and he takes his seat on the throne and he delivers this oration to all of the people. Josephus reports that he had this special outfit made that had silver threads woven throughout all of his garment and that he stood in a unique sort of way so that the sun caught his reflection and it made him look like he was glowing. *Acts 12:22* says: *And the people were shouting, "The voice of a God and not of a man!"*

Well, again the crowd is clearly kissing up to Herod, I mean, they were worshiping him, and Herod just accepted it. But for him it marked the cup of his judgment having reached its fulfillment. Verse 23 says: *Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.* Very interesting greek word here is the Greek word for "struck," the word is "patasso." It's the exact same word in verse 7 which says: *And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands.* Peter and Herod both got struck by an angel. Two vastly different responses. One commentator said God reveals Herod Agrippa's punishment: He had to be devoured by worms and thus suffer an extremely painful and utterly despicable end. Calvin remarks that Herod's body reeked because of decay, so he was nothing more than a living carcass. Josephus supplies the information that Herod died after five days in pain, "in the fifty fourth year of his life and the seventh of his reign." That is, Herod died in A.D. 44. A persecutor of the church, he came to a shameful death relatively soon after he had killed James and incarcerated Peter.

You know why Herod received such an awful punishment? I don't know. I know he was incredibly wicked but he didn't appear to be

any more wicked than all of the other Herods. But you know what I think? I think this goes back to the notion of what I spoke of repeatedly. The notion is this, we are at war, and it appeared that God chose a strategic time for a very public form of punishment. See, this was part of the primary battles that took place right at the very beginning of the church and God is the presiding king plotting a strategy that is going to take all of the ages to fulfill. I mean God knew and God knows precisely what he is doing. And sometimes the battle plan calls for astounding victories on our side. Sometimes the victories seem to go all to the other side and yet we know the battle is already won and the victory already belongs to God. But if you study the book of Acts, you're going to see that sometimes it really doesn't appear that way. I mean, if I was living in the days of the book of Acts, I think my head would be spinning. I mean what we think of as a good thing God sees oftentimes as a bad thing. You know for instance we have this phenomenal growth of the early church starting with 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost and we find in chapter 3 that the church is growing so fast that people are starting to think of it as a place where they can get cheap grace and easy miracles. The communion services become drunken disgraces as Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead. What seems to be a good thing, the rapid growth of the church, God demonstrates from his perspective at this point is not a good thing. And then we get to chapter 6 and we find what

looks like a really bad thing is actually a good thing. Stephen gives essentially the same gospel message that Peter gave and 3,000 were cut to the heart and were saved. Stephen gives the message but he gets an entirely different response. Peter gives the message and repentance breaks out. Stephen gives the message and a murderous rage breaks out. Stephen gets stoned to death. Again, there's a General that is controlling all of this. It is God and he has a plan, a sovereign plan. Stephen getting martyred was the primary means that God used to spread the church. Persecution broke out all over after Stephen's death and Christians were scattered throughout the ancient east but everywhere they went, the gospel was proclaimed and the church began to grow and spread. The point is this: God clearly doesn't do things the way we do things, and that should inform the way we pray. God's already told us in *Isaiah 55: For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Consider the apostle's reaction to the greatest thing God has ever done in the history of the universe. God himself became a man, he lived flawlessly among us, then he allowed himself to be arrested and tried and mocked and flogged and executed that he might pay the price his own justice demanded for our sin, that he might

substitute his righteousness for that sin and thereby free us eternally from bondage. God knew this was absolutely necessary and that it was the most costly and the most wonderful thing he could ever do even though from the disciples' standpoint it was an unmitigated disaster, it was a disgrace that challenged everything that they thought about the Savior that they had lined their lives up to. They were convinced that the crucifixion was the very worst day of their lives when in fact it was arguably the best. His ways are not our ways and the cross is proof of that.

You know, God constantly offers us the cross as the proof of his intentions, as his demonstration of his love and his care and his willingness to die for us, but then he says to us when life hands us bewildering, confusing and sometimes devastating circumstances, he says: *Trust in the LORD with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.* If there was ever a helpful mantra to adopt when it comes to God and prayer, it is God's command in *Proverbs 3: Lean not on your own understanding.* Lean not on your own understanding. Lean not on your own understanding. It's precisely what Pastor Pomeroy stated in the midst of his heartache. He said, "Whatever life brings you, lean on the Lord rather than your own understanding." Joyful prayer doesn't attempt to try to figure God out and neither should we. We simply

acknowledge that God is a good God and that he is in absolute control. We exercise control, confidence and choice. We pray knowing his control is absolute. We pray confidently knowing that God is good all the time, and knowing that control and having that confidence we make that choice to praise him regardless the situation.

And so my prayer for us this morning is simple: Is that how you pray? Can you say that I pray joyfully? There's incredible power in praying prayers that have nothing to do with presumption or despair or doubt but are based solely on the concept of joy. You can't go wrong praying with that attitude. That's how the early church prayed, that's how the Lord Jesus Christ prayed, that's how God would have us pray. Let's pray.

*Father, my prayer is that every one of us can pray with joy. My prayer that every one of us can have absolute confidence that you are in complete control, have absolute confidence that you are a good God all the time, and that we would make the choice regardless the circumstances to pray and to trust that you know what you're doing. Father, give us that attitude, give us that ability to pray, increase our ability to understand and grasp the "how" of prayer, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*