

Growing in Prayer

Jeremiah 33:3

Prayer

THRIVE! Growing and Changing in the Christian Life

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

Sunday, January 3, 2016, 10:30am at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

livinghopechurch.net

“It is remarkable that in all of his writings Paul’s prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances.”

– Timothy Keller¹

Announcements

1. Welcome to visitors
2. No services tonight or Wednesday.
3. New Members class beginning in January 17 at 9:30am during SS.

*I*f you don’t have a Bible, there should be one in the seat in front of you. Open your Bible to **Jeremiah 33**. The title of our message this morning is “Growing in Prayer.”

Happy New Year!

Have you ever felt powerless to change your circumstances? Perhaps last year was one you’d like to forget. And yet, it is the times of difficulty and crushing trials, that God does His best work.

Bookbinding

In order to build up you have to tear down.

Introduction

Jeremiah was a prophet who had a preaching ministry of almost 70 years! Jeremiah had been thrown in the jail in the king’s palace by the political dignitaries (See **Jeremiah 37:15ff**). Chapter 33 records the message Jeremiah received from God in his 40th anniversary of ministry, and so he is around 55 years of age.²

Basically the king said if you keep on preaching and praying, we’re going to throw you in jail! We don’t want you exposing our hypocrisy. We don’t want you interrupting our fun. But

¹ Keller, Timothy (2014-11-04). Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God (p. 20). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

² Zedekiah, the last of the kings of Judah before the captivity is on the throne. Jeremiah 37 and 38 tells us about how Jeremiah was thrown into prison. He went from a dungeon to a jail cell in the king’s palace, to a broken musty, probably disease infested cistern (water tank).

Jeremiah would not buckle—he would not give in. So he kept on preaching and praying and ended up in an ugly jail cell. So this passage records Jeremiah’s second of three imprisonments.

- He had already been in jail once in a dark *dungeon*.
- And he would later be imprisoned in the mire and muck of a broken probably disease infested *cistern*, this broken water tank.
- But for now he was on his second imprisonment, in just a normal *dirty jail cell in the king’s palace* in Jerusalem. He ends up staying in prison this time for *about a year*.

As I said, Jeremiah had been prophesying for forty years. But during this year in prison, God suddenly goes virtually silent. During this dark time, God speaks to Jeremiah only twice. But if God’s going to go silent to test your faith, and leave you with only one promise during your valley experience, then the one God gave Jeremiah during this time is the one you want to have. We find recorded here in **Jeremiah 33:3**.

Would you stand with me as we read the first three verses of Jeremiah 33:1–3 (ESV) — “The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard: 2 “Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is his name: 3 Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

So Jeremiah is in jail, and he’s a bit discouraged as you can imagine. It was not the first time. In **Jeremiah 20:9** tried to resign from the ministry. He said, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

They would later physically abuse Jeremiah. Consider **Jeremiah 37:15ff**— “And the officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the secretary, for it had been made a prison. 16 When Jeremiah had come to the dungeon cells and remained there many days, 17 King Zedekiah sent for him and received him. The king questioned him secretly in his house and said, “Is there any word from the LORD?” Jeremiah said, “There is.” Then he said, “You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.” 18 Jeremiah also said to King Zedekiah, “What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison? 19 Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, ‘The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land’? 20 Now hear, please, O my lord the king: let my humble plea come before you and do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, lest I die there.” 21 So King Zedekiah gave orders, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard. And a loaf of bread was given him daily from the bakers’ street, until all the bread of the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.”

So they threw him in a dungeon, then they transferred him to a jail cell in the palace. They started starving him. He’s probably sick and cold and tired. Emotionally and physically he is exhausted, but spiritually, he is persevering.

Jeremiah Not Alone in Prison

You see, Jeremiah was not alone in that prison. It was during this very time that he gets a message from God. God came down and began to reassure Jeremiah that He was in total control. God says “I’m the maker of everything. I’ve formed it. I’ve established everything.”

So notice what He says in **verse 2**, “Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is his name”.

Let me tell you what God is doing. He’s saying “*Jeremiah, I want to remind you that I am in total control*”

He tells Jeremiah, “I’m the maker of everything! I hung the stars in place. I split the waters of the Red Sea. I cause the sun to rise and the seasons to change. I’m awesome! I can do anything. And you’re not alone in this prison cell. I the LORD am with you—‘the LORD is my Name’.” **God is in total control and He knows right where Jeremiah is because He put Him there for His own purposes.**

Having said that, God goes on to give *the most amazing invitation* found in the Bible here in **verse 3**. We all know this verse. We’re going to break it up into six sections. “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

Today I want to us remember five things:

- The **Privilege** of prayer
- The **Priority** of prayer
- The **Promise** of prayer
- The **Prize** of prayer
- The **Place** of prayer
- The **Practice** of prayer

There are many invitations in the Bible. God says “Come unto me...”

The Amazing Taste of Popcorn

When I was a kid, I would forget about how good popcorn tasted, until while walking through the Mall, I would smell the aroma from the popcorn shop. That aroma was a personal invitation to go in there and buy the popcorn they were selling. That popcorn was irresistible.

There is something infinitely more satisfying than all the greatest aromas in the world. All pleasure is found in this One.

That’s what this verse is. God gives us the aroma of pleasure found in Him. He whets our appetite for Him. We need the invitation of that aroma. We need that reminder! He says “Call unto me”! What an invitation!

Call Me!

Have you ever had someone important give you their card or their number and say: “Call me”? God says to Jeremiah, “Call Me.” What a privilege that God says to us: Call Me! That’s our first point. It’s a privilege!

- I. **The Privilege of prayer**, God gives us an awesome invitation. He says, “Call unto me”.

Prayer is a Personal Privilege

Our God says, “Call unto Me.” God is personal! We are made in His image. We were made to commune and fellowship with God.

Prayer: Not Merely Taking from God, but Taking Hold of God

The privilege is not what we can get from God, but that we get God Himself! We must never see prayer as merely a way to **take things** from God but as a way to **take hold** of God himself. He tells Jeremiah: “Call unto Me.” “I’m a person, not just a textbook or code of ethics.” God is a person with whom we are to grow in friendship and worship through the years.

Prayer, according to **Isaiah 64:7** is a striving to “take hold of God.” We ask with Isaiah: is there “no one who calls upon God’s name, who rouses himself to take hold of Him?”

Heb. 4:16 reminds us, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

What a privilege to talk to God personally. We are no longer His enemies, but He calls us friends! The wonder of salvation is that it is personal. J.I. Packer says in his book, **Knowing God**, that the main thing about prayer is not us opening up to God, but Him opening up to us! Listen to Packer:

“Knowing God is a matter of personal dealing... Knowing God is more than knowing about Him; it is a matter of dealing with Him as He opens up to you, and being dealt with by Him... Friends open their hearts to each other by what they say and do.

We must not lose sight of the fact that knowing God is an emotional relationship, as well as an intellectual and volitional one, and could not indeed be a deep relationship between persons if it were not so.”³

“What is prayer, then, in the fullest sense? Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him.”⁴

Personal Prayer of Martin Luther

Martin Luther was well-known for praying at least two hours a day and emerging with great boldness. But not everyone is a Luther. Nevertheless, Luther told the weakest of Christians to begin to pray by saying the following to the Lord:

“Although . . . you could rightly and properly be a severe judge over us sinners . . . now through your mercy implant in our hearts a comforting trust in your fatherly love, and let us experience the sweet and pleasant savor of a childlike certainty that we may joyfully call you Father, knowing and loving you and calling on you in every trouble.”⁵

Edwards on Personal Prayer

No matter how educated or scholarly a person is, prayer is a very humble personal experience. I think of Jonathan Edwards who gushed about His childlike experiences with God he had in 1737. His description of the experience is supernatural, and it is something we ought to seek. Hear him; he says:

“The person of Christ appeared inexpressibly beautiful with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception . . . which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; [this experience with God] kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to

³ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 39–40.

⁴ Keller, 48.

⁵ Martin Luther, “Personal Prayer Book,” in *Luther’s Works: Devotional Writings II*, ed. Gustav K. Wiencke, vol. 43 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1968), 29 – as quoted by Keller, 71-72.

serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity.”⁶

In Ephesians 1, Paul writes one of the longest sentences in his epistles. The point of this great prayer, and of many of Paul’s prayers is simple. In **Eph. 1:17** (NIV) he writes: “I keep asking that . . . you may know him better.” Paul’s desire is that you and I might grow in our knowledge of Christ!

Prayer is a Powerful Privilege

Jer. 33:2-3, “Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is his name: 3 Call to me...”

It was the Lord that birthed us into the Kingdom by the Spirit. The proof of that powerful transaction is prayer.

Prayer is Like a Baby Breathing

Martin Luther knew that prayer is one of the primary marks of the new birth. He said, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”⁷

Prayer: the Evidence of God’s Power

Regardless of your prayer posture, your prayer life is the measure of the Spirit’s life within you. When Saul of Tarsus was saved, we knew he was saved because in Acts 9:11, the Lord tells Ananias, you’ll be able to find him because, “Behold, he is praying.”

He had said many prayers in his life as a Pharisee, but for the first time, Saul of Tarsus was connecting with God! What a privilege!

Created for Prayer

It is a privilege that the great God of the universe would look down to little tiny insignificant people like you and me and give you this privileged invitation. He says “I want you to ‘call unto Me’”! It is something that education cannot answer for me—why in the world would God ever be interested in me?

It wouldn’t make any difference to God if I was around except for one thing. He created me for this privilege of prayer. He created the sun and stars to shine. He created the clouds to rain. He created the fish to swim. He created the bees to swarm, and He created you and me to glorify Him by enjoying Him, and that enjoyment mostly takes place through prayer.

God’s formed me and He’s established me. He’s my Maker. He’s saved me to be a prayer warrior. It is as natural for a Christian to pray as it is for a human being to take air into his lungs! And that great big holy and righteous God calls on little tiny creatures like you and me, and He give us this amazing invitation. He says “Call unto me”. It’s why we were created!

⁶ “Personal Narrative” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 16: Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 801.

⁷ Quote is paraphrased from Martin Luther, the reformer. *Communion of the Christian with God: Statements of Martin Luther*, edited by Wilhelm Herrmann, Dr.Theol. (New York: Williams & Norgate, 1906), 332.

II. The Priority of prayer – We ought to make prayer a priority because it is commanded by God here in this passage. The God of the universe is issuing this directive: “Call unto me”!

God commands it. We are weak. We are sinful. Prayer keeps us from sin and close to God. You say, “I’m no expert at prayer.” Welcome to the club.

Because God Commands us to Pray

Prayer matters! That’s why God commands us to: “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We are to never cease calling on God and communing with Him.

We need to succeed at prayer. Francis Chan in his book *Crazy Love* says, “Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don’t really matter.”⁸

Prednisone Drops

God tells us we need to call on Him. It’s a command. A couple years ago I had a corneal transplant. If I don’t put prednisone drops into my eyes every day, I will lose my eyesight. Prayer is more important than physical eyesight. It’s having our spiritual eyes open. We must pray! This is why God commands us to pray! If you don’t pray, you’ll lose your spiritual eyesight.

Perhaps you are backsliding. I’m telling you – you need to slow down and stop. You need to seek the Lord. You need to stop what you’re doing and refocus on the Lord.

If you don’t slow down, He’ll slow you down!

The Bible’s Commands to Pray

The commands to pray are **constant** in the Bible. They everywhere. And the Bible without ceasing tells us to pray. We are in need, so we need to pray. We are blind without prayer.

- **Isaiah 55:6**, “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near”.
- **Matthew 7:7**, “Ask and it shall be given unto you...”
- **Mark 14:38**, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
- **Colossians 4:2**, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving”.
- Listen to this amazing invitation: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). And which one of you here is not in need at this very moment?

⁸ Francis Chan. *Crazy Love* (David C. Cook: Elgin, IL, 2013), 92.

Because of Weakness

Prayer must be a priority in our lives because of weakness! Jesus said it this way: Luke 18:1, “Men ought always to pray and not to faint.” We are so prone to faint and wander.

We need a command because **our flesh is weak**, and in our flesh we would almost rather do anything else rather than pray.

- “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is [ALL TO OFTEN] weak” (**Matthew 26:41**). Your physical nature is always in opposition to God’s will unless it is actively crucified.
- “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”! (**John 6:63**). We must obey this command and deny our flesh!
- **Romans 7:15, 18**, “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing.” There’s a part of me that is opposed to God.
- **Psalms 103:14**, “God knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”

Our flesh will agree to minutes for Christ if you give it hours for the world. This is why the Bible commands us to deny ourselves. This is why we even need a command to “call unto” God. It seems strange, but our flesh often blinds us temporarily, and we find ourselves sleeping through our spiritual life. The act which God commands ought to be our greatest happiness! Our flesh makes us forget that the highest pleasures of humanity are found in the presence of God, and God knows that our flesh erases our spiritual memory banks.

Because of Sin!

Prayer must be a priority in our lives because of sin! God gives us a command to pray because prayer is walking in communion and fellowship with Him. **Psalm 66:18**, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” A lack of prayer shows there is sin in our lives. Prayer keeps us from sinning.

There's not a sin in my life or yours that proper prayer would not have avoided. There's not a need in my life or yours that proper prayer cannot meet. “If prayer is anything, then it is almost everything. And yet most of us have difficult praying.”⁹

Because of Conformity to Christ!

Ultimately, all the things that happen to us, both the good and bad, blessings and trials, all conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. **Romans 8:28-29**, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom God foreknew [to be saved] he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

Transition: But now I want to show you something better than the invitation of prayer. Here in **Jeremiah 33:3**, we find something even better than an invitation. We have the certification of prayer. God personally certifies that He will answer prayer.

⁹ The Adrian Rogers Legacy Collection – Sermons. Jeremiah 33:3.

III. The **Promise** of prayer, “I will answer you...”

Jeremiah 33:3 — “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

“I will answer you”. This promise is not from another human being. His answer always comes according to His Word. If it were, it would be no good. This promise is from the God of the universe who NEVER lies. Listen to His guarantee. If you do this I will do that. If you “Call unto me...I will answer you”. What an awesome guarantee, what an awesome promise: he says, “I will [NOT MIGHT] answer you”.

How God Answers: According to His Word

But How Does God Answer? Martin Luther was adamant that we must never get “beyond” God’s words in the Bible or we can’t know whom we are conversing with.¹⁰ “We must first hear the Word, and then afterwards the Holy Ghost works in our hearts; he works in the hearts of whom he will, and how he will, but never without the Word.”¹¹

It doesn’t get plainer than that. He said “Call unto me...I will answer you”. Now do we believe that? Do we believe that God not only *hears* our prayers but also *answers* them?

Jeremiah 33:3 — “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

When God Answers

If God has given you the Lord of Glory, why wouldn’t God answer even your most insignificant prayer?

Sometimes Immediately! That answer maybe specifically delivered. I like you, have asked God for things, and I have received the answer so instantaneously, so miraculously, so factually and real, that no one can convince me that it was mere happenstance or coincidence. I think all of us have prayed.

Sometimes God says wait! All of us as well have been on the trail very long, we have prayed and the answer has been specifically delivered.

Psalms 27:14. “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.”

God always answers prayer – sometimes He says no! Sometimes He says Yes! Sometimes He says wait!

1. Perhaps you are waiting and it has caused a heavy burden. “Cast your burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain you: he shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (**Psalms 55:22**). Cast all your “cares upon Him for He cares for you”.
2. Perhaps you are waiting, and you are weak and fearful! Remember **Isaiah 41:10**, “Fear not; for I am with you: be not dismayed; for I am your God: I will strengthen you; yea, I will help you; yea, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness”.

¹⁰ Keller, 57.

¹¹ Martin Luther. Alexander Chalmers, ed. *Table Talk of Martin Luther* (London: H.G. Bohn, 1857), 107.

- Perhaps you are waiting for healing. Call unto God, for in God is healing. He is the Great Physician. David said, “he healeth all thy diseases” (**Psalm 103:3**). Isaiah said, “with His stripes we are healed!” (**Isaiah 53:5**). James said, “The prayer of faith shall heal the sick!” (**James 5:15**). And we all know total healing comes ultimately when we die, and we see God face to face. And one day the trumpet shall sound, and our mortal bodies shall put on immortality! Hallelujah!

God’s Promises have Prerequisites

God’s promise though, has certain prerequisites. God’s promise of answered prayer is not for just anyone. It is a promise to those who know and love God. God has **not** promised to answer those who do not love Him and who do not obey Him.

So let me say here and now that unanswered prayer is not the fault of God. James says “you have not because you ask not” (James 4:1). Fundamentally, if you are connected to God by the new birth, you will have answered prayer. GUARANTEED.

Matthew 7:7, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

Matthew 7:11, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

John 14:13-14, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

You say, Wow, I’m asking for a Corvette! No, it is in Jesus’ name, which means in His place, and Jesus asks all things according to God’s will.

God is a prayer answering God. God is a reluctant God to any one of His children. God hears the cry of the little sparrow, and how much more will he hear your cry if you know Him!

The problem is that many times we have a different definition of prayer that what God calls prayer. Prayer is not just talking to God. Atheists talk to God. Cultists talk to God. Heretics talk to God. In fact all three groups of these people have hundreds and thousands of their own seminaries and preachers scattered around the world. These people have a form of prayer, but it is not prayer.

But let me specifically give you four prerequisites for any prayer that God will hear.

- Biblical prayer always has a **right heart motive**. **James 4:2-3**, “You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” The motive is not just to ask for things, but to know the Lord. Many people pray. Biblical prayer is something more than asking God for things. Biblical prayer’s desire is God Himself. The motive of all prayer is hungering and thirsting after God—“to know Him” as Paul said in **Philippians 3:10**.
- Biblical prayer always asks **according to God’s will**. 1 John 5:14, “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.” You see you are not praying unless you are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. You are not praying unless your “soul thirst for God and your flesh longs for God in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Psalm 63:1). Prayer is a

desire for God. You may pray for things, but you realize those things are nothing. Ultimately what you really want is God. If you pray that way, you'll get answers.

3. Biblical prayer is always **humble**. It is always from a broken and a contrite heart. **2 Chron. 7:14**, "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." For "God resists the proud but He giveth grace to the humble" (**1 Peter 5:5**). "A broken and a contrite spirit" God "will not despise".
4. Biblical prayer always **fruitful**. It always bears fruit. It always gets answers. We read in **John 15:5, 7-8**, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." And **verses 7-8**, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

This is the mark of a true disciple. We prove we are Christ's disciples by the fruit of answered prayer. You see God's on our side. God doesn't want us to be unsuccessful. He wants us to bear fruit. He wants us to get answers. God wants us to be fruitful and to be productive, and to be successful in Him! And so God says, if you call "I will answer"! That's His promise and His will!

The blessed man in Psalm 1:3 is "like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper."

IV. **The Prize of prayer**, "[I] will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

The prize of prayer is not the thing we ask for, but our communion with God Himself, and the deep abiding joy that we have in knowing Him. There are so many things we do not know about our wonderful God.

Open Your Mouth, and I will Fill it, I will Satisfy You

Israel had this same problem. We see this in **Psalm 81:10-16**, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. 11 "But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. 12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. 13 Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!" Look at **verse 16**, "But he would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

Hebrew Definition: Hidden Behind a Wall

Let's look at the Old Testament Hebrew **Definition**. The phrase "hidden things"—literally means "fortified" things, things that are hidden or protected behind a wall. Essentially, God says, call unto me, and I will open things up to you which were closed before—I will illuminate spiritually blinded or dull eyes.

“We walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Prayer brings great hidden things to light, things only revealed through spiritual illumination. And there are many things that we do not know because we do not pray. Prayer gives us what we lack, and that is spiritual illumination. I want to show you this from this verse in the OT, and then I want you to see Paul’s extended treatment of it in the NT.

God Love Surprises

God has so many hidden things for you, but you must seek Him in prayer! God loves surprises!

Learning new things is exciting! Have you ever seen a new believer? They’re constantly learning, learning, learning. Their hearts are constantly burning within them as they walk with Jesus. How long has it been since your heart burned in you? If you are not learning, it is almost definitely a result of a lack of prayer.

We read in **Jeremiah 33:3**, “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.”

V. The Place of prayer.

– **Timothy Keller** says, “It is remarkable that in all of his writings Paul’s prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances.”¹²

“Call unto Me!”, God says. But Jeremiah was in a prison. He’s in the dungeon. Spiritual illumination takes place where ever and when ever you are communing with the Spirit. And God says to Jeremiah, I know you’re in a jail cell, and you’re going to need to commune with me. “Call unto me”.

Jeremiah is in Prison

Remember Jeremiah is in prison here. And he’s got more prison time even after this year of imprisonment. From the dungeon he went to the king’s jail. From the king’s jail he’s going into the muck and mess of the broken cistern—chained in a broken water tank!

Now sometimes we don’t know our own needs, and it takes hard times in our life to squeeze those prayers out of us.

Nothing is Impossible for God

There's nothing that God cannot do. And actually, when you look at this passage of Scripture where God says, "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known," it's really in the context of national problems. Don't you have kind of an uneasy feeling about everything that's happening in the world today. Well, God had been telling Jeremiah, "Hey, Jeremiah, everything's in control." Now, there's Babylon.

There's the captivity. All of these things are going to happen, and in **Jer. 32**, God begins to talk about His plan for Israel. He talks about the Babylonian captivity. Then He talks about their coming back to the land. Then He talks about the **coming Kingdom of Christ**. And then He tells Jeremiah to pray.

¹² Keller, Timothy (2014-11-04). Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God (p. 20). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

In prayer, we unite with God in regulating the nations and operating the universe. I don't understand it all. God never wastes our pain. He tells us in that pain to pray!

Miscarriages

I remember before Katie was born, Jill miscarried with twins. We prayed! I couldn't have imagined five beautiful children. All I could see was the chaos. All I could feel was the pain. But we called unto God. He answered. He doesn't always answer with a yes. But all God's answers will conform us to the image of Christ. Is that enough for you? Or do you need your "gift list" filled from God before you love Him?

Those gifts and things won't satisfy you. If my wife and kids are taken away I will be sad, but my joy in them is because of Jesus. Take the world – take all that is dear, but give me Jesus!

Jail Cells – John Bunyan

Jail cells have been places of great prayer and spiritual illumination. John Bunyan spent 18 years in a damp and dirty prison cell in Bristol England. Out of it came many prayers and also many books. One best know is "Pilgrim's Progress".

But many times God has to slow us down with sickness or tragic circumstances, unfair and unjust circumstances. That's all ok. God is the judge. But we all have our dark dungeons of life, and God says—that's a great place for spiritual illumination.

Susanna Wesley

Let me tell you about Susanna Wesley. She knew how to make time and how to find a place for prayer. She had 19 children! To say that she was a busy woman would be an understatement. When she needed time with God, she would sit in a chair and throw her apron over her head. Her children knew not to disturb her during her prayer time. We're told that she seldom spent less than an hour each day in prayer. Her sons John and Charles Wesley founded the Methodist church and wrote many of the hymns that are still sung by Christians throughout the world.

John, her fifteenth child, said this about his mother: "I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians in England." What an encouragement to any of us who think we are too busy to find time to pray!

I love what one old saint of God said about Jeremiah's praying in this very uncomfortable place. He said, "No confinement can deprive God's people of his presence; no locks nor bars can shut out his gracious visits; nay, oftentimes *as their afflictions abound their consolations much more abound*, and they have the most reviving communications of his favour when the world frowns upon them. Paul's sweetest epistles were those that bore date out of a prison" (Matthew Henry). So find a place where you can be undistracted and uninterrupted from God's presence.

VI. The Practice of prayer.

10 Lessons in the Practice of Prayer

In 1993, I met an elderly woman on an Amtrak train who taught me the practice of prayer. I was a new believer, and to my surprise she had be walking with the Lord for over 50 years. She told me the secret to the freshness in her life. Let me give you 10 lessons in prayer that I've compiled from her and others.

1. Make prayer a habit. When you fail, start over, day by day by day, until prayer becomes a habit.
2. Designate a time and place where you regularly go to pray. My elderly friend told me she would always get up early in the morning before anyone awoke. At first she would fall asleep, but then she would walk around her prayer room while she prayed so she could stay awake.
3. Make that time and place the most optimal for you. Find the time when your mind is keenest, your attention strongest. Early in the morning is best, but there are many successful models. Hudson Taylor prayed in the middle of the night to keep from distractions. Adoniram Judson prayed seven times during the day and night. David prayed at “morning, noon and evening.” Daniel prayed three times a day. The model is not as important as the consistency.
4. Take your Bible, notebook, pen, and devotional materials. It’s unthinkable for me to have a quiet time without a Bible and notebook. I expect God to say something. If He does, I want to write it down. The weakest ink is better than the best memory.
5. Begin by reading God’s Word. Don’t pray too extensively before reading the Bible. Read the Bible, then pray. What God says to you is more important than what you say to God. Your prayer will be enlivened and instructed when you get into the Word of God.
6. Learn to pray about things all through the day. “Pray without ceasing.”
7. Keep a record of your requests and answered prayers in a journal. When you look back, you’ll be incredibly blessed to see how many prayers God has answered. A prayer journal will increase your faith.
8. Put on the whole armor of God. Prayer is warfare. The doorbell rings, you get sleepy, your mind wanders. Hell’s artillery will come against you when you pray, so...
9. If you’re by yourself, pray out loud. My mind wants to wander when I pray. Vocalizing your prayers keeps your mind from wandering.
10. If it does wander, pray about that thing. Thoughts will come to you like: I must remember that; I need to do this. If the thing drawing your attention away from prayer is that important, evidently it’s really on your mind, so pray about it. The distraction becomes the focal point of my prayer. Then I return to my original prayer.

ACTS Prayer Model

The ACTS model will be helpful to you as you learn how to pray. ACTS stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

Adoration means worship. Praying this way, you can start with, “God, you are powerful! I praise you for being my shelter. I adore you for all that you are! I praise you for electing me, dying on the cross for me, foreordaining my steps!

Praise Him for who He is and for all that He has done for you. God delights in your praises!

Confession, the next component, means agreeing with God about the things that you have done wrong. God already knows what you’ve done, so confession is primarily for your accountability. We all need accountability.

It's a time to express sorrow about how you have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Acknowledge that you've broken His law. Call sin, sin! Ask God to forgive you for these things, and then believe that He does so freely.

When you confess your sins, you receive God's cleansing and this helps to remove any barrier in your communication with Him. **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."

Thanksgiving basically means being thankful to God. Thank Him for His love, protection, and provision just to name a few things.

Supplication is the final component, and this means praying for God to *supply* your needs and the needs of others, such as friends, family, your pastors and officers of the church, missionaries, government leaders, and persecuted Christians around the world. Pray for great things from God. Remember **Philippians 4:19**, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

You may want to pray for such things as God's guidance, wisdom, and opportunities to serve. Pray as well for God to save the lost all around you.

Keep in mind that the ACTS model serves as a guide to help you, not a rigid formula to follow. There is no "canned" approach that you need to take; just talk from your heart.

Conclusion

You see, our problem is not that we ask too much from God, but that we ask too little. And we end up attempting very little.

Hudson Taylor: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

We ask for much too little from our great and awesome God. God created the worlds. He says "Call unto me and I will answer you"! Do you believe that? God ALWAYS answers! He never sleeps or slumbers. He's never on a vacation! There is no reluctance in God to give us anything!! Call unto Him and He will answer!!