

Review lesson for prayer

February 7, 2010

For the past fourteen weeks, we have looked at various prayers of the NT

- It has been my desire all along to expose you to these prayers with a few goals in mind
 - o That you might have a more meaningful relationship with the Lord through prayer
 - o That you might see where your own prayer life needs to change
 - o That you might pray more Biblically – and thus more effectively – and see your prayers answered

We have examined eight (8) prayers of the NT

- The Model Prayer as given by Christ to His disciples
- Six (6) prayers of the apostle Paul
- The Lord's Prayer in John 17

If you synthesize these prayers together, here are the requests that emerge

- We should have the highest goal of our lives to glorify & honor the name of God
- We should expect love to be demonstrated in our lives
 - o This love should be overflowing, discerning, purifying, and honoring
- We should be a thankful people, acknowledging all that God and others have done for us
- We should seek to be filled with the knowledge of God's will
- We should strive to please God in everything we do
- We can trust God that He will take care of matters in the future – we don't need to be concerned when it *appears* that justice is not being carried out
- We should seek to live lives that are in accordance with what His Word teaches us
- We need to be praying for ourselves, present believers and even future believers
- We can live with hope and faith, knowing that God is in control
- We should pray for God's power to be displayed in our lives
- We should acknowledge that we have many areas in which progress needs to be made

Do these describe your prayer life?

- Are you seeking to implement these?

Obviously, this is a lot to take in at one time

- I am not going to take the time to review each and every prayer that we have studied
- You can look at the notes on the website for further study and reflection

The disciples asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1)

- He answered His disciples then
- And if you are serious about your desire to pray, He will answer that prayer today

God delights in seeing us pray

- Prayer is an acknowledgement of dependence – that we need God
- Prayer is also a necessary part of our relationship with God

All of us have, at some point, made various excuses not to pray

- I want us to take some time this morning to look at some of the common excuses why Christians don't pray

I hope that you understand that the mere knowledge of these prayers is not sufficient

- You can study prayer without praying
- You can talk about prayer without praying
- You can teach about prayer without praying

So unless you overcome some of these common excuses, this study will be very short-lived

- Without praying, your own prayer life will most likely remain unchanged

What are some common excuses that people offer as reasons not to pray?

- *What do you think?*

I want us to discuss five (5) excuses that are commonly given as to why we don't pray¹

- I am too busy to pray
- I feel too dry spiritually to pray
- I feel no need to pray
- I am too bitter to pray
- I am too ashamed to pray

Let's examine these one at a time

- Perhaps you can relate to these this morning

Perhaps you are using these excuses right now

- If so, you need to repent!

I. I am too busy to pray

We are all busy, aren't we?

- It seems as if this is the first response you receive when you ask, "How are you doing?"

I have heard this so much lately that I have made an intentional effort not to use this response

- It is not as if I am not busy
- It's simply that I know everyone is busy, so why use this as a comeback?

We all live busy lives

- Work
- Home
- Extracurricular activities
- School

We are no longer living by the clock

- For many of us, it seems like there aren't enough hours in the day to get everything accomplished

The result of our busy lives is the absence of quality time in the spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith

- Absence of time spent reading, meditating, and thinking deeply upon God's Word
- Absence of time spent reading and digesting good Christian books, autobiographies, and commentaries
- Absence of time spent with other Christians discussing the things of God
- Absence of prayer, fasting, etc.

¹ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Transformation*, 111-22. This book is a gem on the subject of prayer. In chapter 7, he offers a list of excuses that I will discuss in this chapter.

A story is told of a couple who was driving down the road when they noticed a new Cadillac parked on the side of the road with its hood up²

- The young couple pulled over and offered to help, if they could

The driver, rather embarrassed, admitted that he was out of gas

- He had noticed the “low fuel” light blinking on his dashboard
- However, he was running late for a meeting and thought he could go a few more miles

The couple had a spare gallon of gas in their car and offered it to the man

- The man in the Cadillac thanked the couple and then sped off

A few miles down the road, this couple spotted the same car on the side of the road again

- They pulled over once more to see the source of the problem
- You guessed it! The car was out of gas again

The man had driven past a few gas stations since he was so late to his meeting at work

- And he was now out of gas...again

We shake our heads at this guy who is obviously too busy to stop for five minutes and fill up with gas

- We think to ourselves, “How can you be so busy to overlook something so important?”

Yet, beloved, how much more important is time spent in God’s Word and prayer than gas in a car?

- How many times have we neglected this quality time with God day after day, only to find ourselves spiritually empty?

Jesus Christ was the busiest Person ever to walk on Earth

- No one here this morning can even come close to being as busy as He was

Yet, as we have seen in our study of John 17, Christ always took time to pray

- Praying with others
- Praying by Himself

Admit it – *it is hard to be a Mary in a Martha’s world!*

- Christ responded to Martha with these words, “**Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but *only* a few things are necessary, really *only* one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her**” (Lk 10:41-42)

Beloved, fill in your name there as well

- We are all guilty

Let’s be like Mary who focused on one thing

- That was sitting at the feet of Jesus

This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t strive for excellence in our work, family, and other activities

- But it does mean that we should have Christ as our highest priority

So being busy is not an excuse for neglecting prayer

² Carson, 111-12.

II. I feel too dry spiritually to pray

There are times when we set aside time to pray, only to find out that it doesn't seem to accomplish anything

- We may be discouraged
- We may be tired
- We may be at a spiritual low
- We may be distracted by something else on our schedule

The temptation to give up and push off prayer is very real

- But we must fight against this urge

Notice the excuse is, "I *feel* too dry spiritually to pray"

- We cannot live our lives by our feelings
 - o *They are subjective and constantly changing*
 - o *They can't be trusted!*

This is an unbiblical excuse for not praying for two main reasons

- It makes my acceptability to God in prayer dependent upon how I feel
 - o But isn't this a slap in the face of God?
 - o Isn't the basis for our acceptance to God in prayer the finished work of Christ on the cross?
 - o We all have times when we aren't in the best of mental framework; however, we need to remind ourselves even more diligently of the work of Christ
- It supposes that my responsibility to pray is somehow diminished when I don't feel like praying
 - o This is a very self-centered approach to prayer
 - o It basically puts me in the position of determining what my duties and obligations are
 - o Yet the Lord reigns as our Lord and Sovereign, even in our prayer life

We need to persevere in prayer, especially in times when we don't feel well, may be sleepy, etc.

- Don't live by your feelings
- And certainly don't govern your prayer life by your feelings, either

III. I feel no need to pray

This is similar to the second excuse listed above

- But a little different

It is possible for you to affirm the need to pray, but only for those who you think are weaker in character

- In other words, you are strong enough not to pray
- This, of course, is veiled arrogance and pride

This is the treatment of God as a spare tire

- Calling on Him only when you have a crisis
- When the crisis is over, so is the need for Him

Instead of living the Christian life as one of dependence upon God, you begin to rely on self

- Self-reliance
- Self-sufficiency
 - o *This attitude is self-destructive!*

It is easy for us to know enough of the Word and begin to think, “I don’t need to pray about this.”

- “**in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God**” (Phil 4:6)

If we are not careful, we can become comfortable with mediocrity

- The attitude that we want to be godly, as long as it doesn’t make us uncomfortable

I read this quote on the Internet last week and I would like to share it with you

- “I would like to buy about three dollars worth of the gospel, please. Not too much—just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don’t want so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don’t want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people, but I myself don’t want to love those from different races—especially if they smell. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three dollars worth of gospel, please”³

If we think of ourselves as being strong, we won’t pray

- If we think of ourselves as being weak, we will be driven to God in prayer

“**Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall**” (1 Cor 10:12)

When you feel no need to pray, that is the very moment that you need to pray the most

- Run to God confessing your pride and self-reliance

But don’t neglect prayer just because you don’t feel the need to pray

IV. I am too bitter to pray

Being a Christian does not insulate us from getting hurt

- Unfortunately, some of the worst injuries I have received have been from those who call themselves Christians

The reality is that we will offend and hurt one another with our words, actions, or both

- That is why forgiveness is so crucial in our everyday relationships

But if we nurture bitterness, anger, and gossip in our hearts, it will keep us from meaningful prayer

- In order to pray biblically, we know that we must both ask forgiveness from God and grant forgiveness to those who sin against us

There may be times when you come before God with such a rotten attitude toward someone else

- The Bible is clear, “**For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.** ¹⁵ **“But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions”** (Mt 6:14-15)

By forgiving others as Christ has forgiven us, we demonstrate that we really want the Father’s forgiveness

- But if we harbor sin in our hearts, we demonstrate that we don’t really understand forgiveness
- This harboring and nurturing of sin will rob us of precious time in prayer

³ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, pp. 12-13.

The painful reality is that if you come before God with unforgiveness in your heart, don't think that God will be forgiving to you

- "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph 4:31-32)

If you feel as if you are too bitter to pray, then forgive those who have sinned against you

- Then run to God asking Him to humble your heart

V. I am too ashamed to pray

It could be that you have the opposite problem of excuse #4

- You fully forgive others for their sins
- But you find it hard to accept forgiveness for your own sins

When you come before God, you feel dirty

- You feel ashamed
- You feel unworthy

Well, if that describes you, then great!

- Take a number!

The reality is that all of us are unworthy of forgiveness

- None of us deserves salvation

But don't let sin keep you from a meaningful prayer life

- Adam and Eve hid from God after their sin in the Garden (Gen 3:8)
- This was clearly the wrong action to take

Consider these verses of Scripture

- "For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He watches all his paths" (Prov 5:21)
- "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:12-13)

Satan would have us think it best to run from God

- As the accuser of the brethren, he would have us be ashamed of our sin

But sin – and the shame that it could bring – should drive us back to God

- He is the only One who can cleanse us
- He is the only One who can forgive us

These are five common excuses that are offered as reasons not to pray

- I am too busy to pray
- I feel too dry spiritually to pray
- I feel no need to pray
- I am too bitter to pray
- I am too ashamed to pray

But there really is no excuse not to pray

- I trust that you will repent of any excuse that you are making
- I trust that you will revive your relationship with God through reviewing these prayers of the NT