

To Remain in Christ: You Must Learn How to Pray

Part IV

John 15:7-8

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church
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Intro. Don't forget, everything we're doing for these next several weeks is based upon one principle: It is our job to remain in Christ; it is His job to bear fruit in our lives.

To remain in Christ (and thereby bear much fruit, v.5), you must learn to pray.

Why do I say that? Look at John 15:7 "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you."

1. Main Points of this section on prayer as a Spiritual Discipline
 - a. You must saturate your mind and heart with Scripture!
 - b. You must believe that prayer is effective and necessary!
 - c. You must believe that God can answer prayer because of His limitless sovereignty!
 - d. You must plan to pray!
 - e. You must not think of prayer as a personal pipeline to a heavenly shopping centre. (Prayer is not a secret gateway to a free version of Amazon.com)
 - f. You must pray the Scriptures!
2. To learn to pray you must believe in prayer — that it is necessary and effective.
 - a. You must believe that God is listening to you.

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

- i. Part of coming to God is believing that He listens when you pray.
 - ii. Don't ignore that last clause: "He rewards those who earnestly seek him."
- b. You must believe that God's work is done in response to the prayers of His people, *that He has rested the success of His entire enterprise — the outworking of Christ's victory over sin and death to the ends of the earth — upon the zeal and commitment of His people.* Let me explain what I mean.
- i. God has chosen to do about 99.9% of His work through His people. "We are labourers together with God." (I Cor. 3:9) That means God will instruct us and direct us in the work He wants us to do, but we have to ask for His help. God will empower us for the work to which we are called, but we have to ask. God will use us for His glory, but we have to assure Him in prayer that this is what we want, because sometimes His glory is best shown in suffering and death, rather than in triumph. It is in prayer that we are enabled to break through our personal resistance to God's work in us, and

it is in prayer that power flows through us and begins to work in other lives.

- (1) John Wesley quote: “God does nothing except in response to prayer.” Even if that is an exaggeration, it is exaggeration that makes an important point leading to a desired effect.

Now let’s look at II Cor. 5:18-20

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

- (2) II Cor. 5:18-20 tells us three things about our role in applying Christ’s victory to the world. And notice these three things have been given to all Christians, not just to professional ministers.
 - (a) God “gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” (V.18)
 - (b) God has “committed to us the message of reconciliation.” (V.19)
 - (c) God has made us “Christ’s Ambassadors” for the purpose of “making His appeal through us.” (V.20)

- (3) The desired effect (of Paul and of John Wesley) is that we fill our days with prayer in order to be sure of two things: 1) that God’s work is not failing to get done, and 2) that we are never trying to work alone.

- ii. We have to pray for spiritual power because of what God expects us to be doing in the world right now. And by “right now” I mean this 2,000-years-and-more period of time that the Bible calls the Last Days. In this period known as the last days we need to ask two questions: 1) What is Christ doing? And 2) What are we supposed to be doing?

Heb. 10:12-14 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect those who are being made holy.

- (1) Christ is waiting for us make His enemies His footstool.
- (2) He has won the victory and now He expects us to fight from that position in order to work out the full ramifications of His finished work.
 - (a) The cross was a kind of spiritual D-day. (I’m thinking here of WWII)
 - (b) Once the beachhead was fully established (June 6 - June 30, 1944), victory over the Axis powers was a foregone conclusion, although there was still a lot of fighting, a lot of suffering and dying yet to do.
 - (c) Christ’s victory over sin and death (Satan’s only real weapons) was

established definitively at the cross. Now He is waiting for that victory to be progressively established to the ends of the earth. But there is still a lot of spiritual fighting to do. The final victory is assured, but in the meanwhile there is still suffering, and even death ahead for God's people.

- iii. How do we fight from victory? We do so through embracing our own crosses. Our victories must partake of the same qualities as our Lord's victory. We don't mind dying because we know that we will rise again, sometimes in this life, always in the life to come. Thus we must willingly suffer for the gospel, embracing death if necessary, for the purpose of completing the formation of Christ's church.
- (1) Paul to the Colossian Christians: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (Col. 1:24).
 - (2) If you pray for grace to die to self, this is a prayer that will be answered. If you pray to be able to show Christ's resurrection power to the world, God will answer. But to do that He will very likely have to kill you and then raise you up, and he will have to do so in such a way that the world will know it was done by God, not man.
 - (3) As an illustration consider Daniel, taken captive by the Babylonians and made a slave in Babylon. This was a kind of death for Daniel, but God's purpose was to resurrect Daniel in so powerful a way that eventually even Nebuchadnezzar became a believer in Daniel's God.
 - (4) Nor was that the last death Daniel had to die. As an old man we find him in Daniel 6 suddenly having to choose between rejection of God or death in a lion's den. In Daniel's life, as in the lives of all Christ's followers, the deaths keep coming, but so do the resurrections. We die. God raises us up, and all the glory goes to Him.
3. You must believe that God *can* answer prayer. Notice Jesus' utter assurance that God will answer prayer. ". . . ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." This is much like the assurance and confidence Jesus displayed in 14:13-14 "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Before we speak about the strength of Jesus' promise, and the source of Jesus' promise, I think we should take a moment to brainstorm just what we would ask for if we really believed Jesus' promise. The clue is to take God's word and build your prayers upon it. And when you pray, you need to pray with the confidence that Jesus expresses in His promise.

Three New Testament Prayers

- Mat. 6:9-15 The Lord's Prayer. Never doubt that God will answer every line of it.

- Paul's prayer in Eph. 1:16-19

16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

- The Church's Prayer in Acts 4:24-31

24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. {[26] That is, Christ or Messiah} '{[26] Psalm 2:1,2}

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people {[27] The Greek is plural.} of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

- * The Acts 4 church believed the creator God could do whatever was needed because there was no limit to his power. This is worship! Our problems grow small when we worship the mighty God!
- * The Acts 4 church believed God would answer their prayer because they believed they were working out in history what God had prophesied from Old Testament times. This is assurance. As someone has said, "We are immortal until God is finished with us!"
- * The Acts 4 church prayed in the confidence that the same God who sent His Son to the cross, could also use their troubles for His glory. This is authority on God's part and submission and obedience on their part!
- * The Acts 4 church asked for what they understood God wanted to give them, courage to boldly proclaim the gospel in the face of great danger and persecution. This is faith. This is asking based upon God's Word! This is asking, not telling, in our relationship with God. This is not about trying to get God on our side, but being sure we are on God's side. Real prayer is joyful acceptance that our lives are in God's hands. We pray when we

surrender to the sovereignty of God! We pray when we plead for power to glorify Him whatever He does.

- **Principle:** Confidence in God leads to confidence in prayer, and confidence in prayer leads to confidence in proclamation.

If we are to be like the early church, then we must believe that God's sovereignty over His world is without limit. In fact, I would argue that trusting in God's sovereignty is a part of what it means to come to God. Jesus, of course, is our great example of what God can do. When He spoke, the winds and the waves obeyed him — instantly! When you pray, do you believe that God can answer your prayers just as directly, just as powerfully? Maybe your first prayers should be for faith to believe in answered prayer.

- a. Accepting the sovereignty of God involves the Biblical teaching of Meticulous Providence — that God is in charge, everywhere and at all times, working out every event, both large and small, for the purpose of fulfilling His will. (Eph. 1:11 “[God] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”)

I do not deny that some people shrink from affirming God's sovereignty and especially His sovereignty in daily providence because they fear to reduce man's autonomy or freedom. But this could never be. God's Word affirms both. Somehow He is sovereign in such a way that His will is never thwarted, his plans are always accomplished. But at the same time man remains free, in the sense of uncoerced or unforced, either in rebellion or obedience. The bible never diminishes man's freedom or responsibility (although these themes are often exaggerated beyond all recognition)

What I want to do, however, is balance the equation somewhat with a new look at God's meticulous direction of all events that happen in this world, *and to do so for the purpose of encouraging you to pray.*

Accepting the sovereignty of God is important because you need to know that in order to answer prayer God has to be able to work on all sides of every question. If we pray for **healing**, in order to answer that prayer God has to be able to work at the cellular level in our bodies. If we pray for **employment**, to answer that prayer God has to be able to direct the mind and actions of the HR people who work for your future employer. If a farmer prays for **rain**, God has to be able to move the clouds so that the rain falls on the praying man's land and not accidentally somewhere else. If a nation prays for **protection from its enemies**, God has to be able to confound the plans of a determined opponent.

But none of these things *can* happen if God is not personally at work all the time and in every place. Allow me to illustrate. If a desperate farmer prays for rain, God might not be able to answer that prayer if even one little breeze is not under his complete control.

Here's the same illustration as a logic problem. Suppose there were a million individual decisions that have to be attended to in order to answer the farmer's prayer for rain. But

suppose also that God was only sovereign over 999,999 of those things. Could God then guarantee that the rain would fall where He wanted it to fall? I don't think so. If you stand on the earth and shoot for the moon; if you are off by even one-tenth of one degree you will probably miss it by a thousand miles.

One little tiny thing gone wrong can destroy everything else. For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe the horse was lost. For want of a horse the rider was lost. For want of a rider the battle was lost. For want of a battle the kingdom was lost. And all for want of a horseshoe nail.

God's nails are never lost, and therefore God's plans are never lost either.

But I wouldn't dare emphasize the totality of God's sovereignty without drawing attention to the personal nature of God's sovereignty.

- i. Personal nature of God's sovereignty (Mat. 10:29,31 "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.") This is why we speak of *meticulous providence*.

- (1) Meticulous providence means God is directly, personally involved in every detail of every life, but for the Christian that involvement comes with the very special knowledge that a God of love is working it all out for our good. (Rom. 8:28, 38-39)

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- (2) Pagan fatalism says, "I have to learn to accept what comes to me. In an indifferent world what else can I do?"
- (3) Christian faith says, "I accept what comes, but I know that through prayer, through personal conversation with the God of heaven, I can have a major impact on what comes.
 - (a) that everything comes from a good God who loves me!
 - (b) that everything only and always comes for my good!
 - (c) That prayer can help me see how to relate to what comes!
 - (d) That prayer can directly influence what comes!

- ii. The confidence that belief in God's meticulous providence can give even when things

are going wrong.

II Tim. 1:12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

- b. If you believe in meticulous providence . . .
 - i. You know God can help when you are in need.
 - ii. You know that your prayers can have a direct effect upon situations far beyond your sphere of influence.
 - (1) That missionary working underground in China.
 - (2) The Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, a 32-year-old pastor who was arrested in October 2009 and later sentenced to death for converting to Christianity.
 - (3) That Prairie Bible Institute will overcome the evil that is currently attacking it.
 - (4) Your battles with temptation. He can rearrange circumstances to protect you from your weaknesses. He can change your heart!
 - (5) Your attempts to reconcile with someone who is refusing all your overtures toward reconciliation. When you ask God to change a person's heart, He can!

What a mighty God we serve
What a mighty God we serve
Angels bow before Him
Heaven and earth adore Him
What a mighty God we serve.

- 4. To learn to pray you must plan to pray.
 - a. Include prayer time in your Bible reading time.
 - b. Practice conversation with God as part of your moment-by-moment experience in life.
 - c. Journal your prayers. Write them down and date them. Later you can read them back to see how God has acted in the intervening period.
 - d. Plan to meet with other people who pray
 - i. Family and friends
 - ii. Worship services
 - iii. small groups
 - iv. prayer meetings
 - v. Special seasons of prayer (perhaps alone)
 - vi. Prayer partners/accountability groups

5. To learn to pray you must pray the Scriptures.
 - a. Pray the Lord's Prayer (Mat. 6:9-13).
 - b. Pray the Psalms.
 - c. Pray the Prayers of the Bible
 - i. Herbert Lockyer's *All the Prayers of the Bible*. The book is still copyrighted, but here is a website that gives the table of contents in a pdf format. That table of contents includes all the prayers and their Scripture references. All you miss is Lockyer's commentary.
 - ii. <http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Christian%20Life/Prayer.pdf>
 - d. Pray the Promises of God's Word (Precious Bible Promises compiled by Samuel Clarke)
 - i. http://www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Promises/Clarkes_Bible_Promises.html
 - e. Pray the Commands of God's Word
 - i. Remember Cat and Dog theology
 - (1) Cats always pray the promises
 - (2) Dogs pray the promises and the commands
 - ii. God never separates the two.
6. To learn to pray you must *not* think of prayer as a personal pipeline to a heavenly shopping centre. Rather Prayer is about Kingdom living and Kingdom growth.

Matthew 6

- 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'
- 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.
- 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

What is the subject matter of Kingdom-seeking prayers?

- a. You should pray for your own thoroughgoing conversion (definitive, progressive, complete). (What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Mark 8:36)
- b. You should pray that your life be used as God wants to use it, either in private or in public, in high places or low, in riches or in poverty, in apparent success or apparent failure. (You are not your own; you were bought at a price. I Cor. 6:19-20)

Phil. 4:11-13

- 11 . . . for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.
- 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret

of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

- c. You should pray for the ongoing advance of the Kingdom, and as specifically as possible for everyone working to promote the glory of God. Pray for pastors and elders, for missionaries and SS teachers. Pray for persecuted Christians and pray for their persecutors. Pray for opportunities to tell others how to know God, how to be saved. Pray for the struggling, the lost, the hurting, the rebellious. Pray for God to show Himself powerful and glorious throughout the earth.
 - d. You should pray prayers of worship and adoration toward God, first for who He is, then for what He has done.
 - e. You should pray that God would illuminate the truth of His Word in your own mind and heart.
7. To learn to pray be sure that your prayers rejoice the heart of God. These are the prayers that get answered. (Note the summary on the PPT screen)

I John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him.

Before God compare yourself to a child asking its parents for extra time to do more homework, or asking for gasoline so he can mow the lawn. Would parents grant such requests? What would God do if your prayers were always according to His will?

Conclusion: Commit to being a man or woman of prayer. Prayer is not a spiritual gift in the sense that a spirit of prayer is given to some, but not to others. Prayer is the duty and the privilege of every one of God's children.