

Christians, do you pray? And I don't mean just here in church, although that's a good thing too. We should pray here in church together as the body of Christ. But I mean, do you pray in your daily lives? Are your days filled with and characterized by a spirit of prayer? Martin Luther once said, "I am so busy today that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer." Is that something that we can say of ourselves? That even when things are getting tough, even when things are getting kind of overwhelming, we still make time for prayer? Or do we find ourselves maybe making excuses, coming up with all kinds of reasons why we'll do it later, and we'll get to it later.

Christians, I know how hard it is to pray, because, well, it's one of the most difficult things that we can do as Christians. Because nowhere else is the struggle between the old man, the man of sin, and the new man, the man of righteousness, more clear. Because the old man, our sinful nature, doesn't want to pray. We don't want anything to do with God or anything that even relates to God. And so we'll find all kinds of excuses, whatever it might be, to get out of it. But the new man, that righteousness which we have from Christ, loves to pray, wants to be in the presence of God, and delights in prayer. But how often do we feel that tension within ourselves, that tension throughout all of our lives?

But Christians, there is something wonderful about prayer. There is something about glorious about prayer. Because you have in prayer a gateway to God. God Himself spends time with you. God Himself listens to you. It doesn't matter what time it is. It doesn't matter where it is. It doesn't matter what kind of circumstances you are in. God has promised to listen to us whenever we pray to him. I mean, just think of it this way. Try to go find an audience with the President. Do you think you'd ever even get close? Trying even going down to Bismarck, to the governor, try to get into his office. Do you think you could even get in if you were three weeks in advance? Probably not. But the king of all creation, the one who has all things in his hands, including your very life, is always ready to listen to you, to hear you when you pray. And he is always going to give you his full and undivided attention. Nothing you bring to him is going to be too small. Nothing you bring to him is going to be unimportant. It is all important to him because he loves you.

Because think about what Jesus is saying here in John chapter 16 today. Jesus says this: "In that day you will ask nothing of me." Now maybe just to clarify a couple of things so that we understand what Jesus is talking about here. In the original language, there's actually two words here, [and] we both translate both of them as the word "ask," but they mean a little bit different things. One of them means to ask about something, you know, to try to find out more information, to try to learn something. But the other means to ask for something. You're requesting something, and you want to get something from someone that you know and trust. Jesus is using both of these words here. And so we want to understand what he's trying to say. In verse 23, he says: "In that day, you will ask nothing of me." And that's that ask-about word. So he's saying you're not going to ask about what this thing means anymore. Because the disciples up to this point had been very confused. They don't understand what Jesus is saying, because frankly, they don't really understand who God is. And so they're always asking about things, because they don't know as much as they should.

But Jesus says, "Truly, truly I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you." And this one is that ask-for word. Whatever you ask for from God, he's going to give it to you. And so when we see how those two words are working there, we can understand what Jesus is saying. You're no longer going to have to ask about things, ask about what does this mean? Or who are you God? Because God Himself knows us. God Himself loves us. And whatever we ask for in his name he's going to give to us, because he knows what we need even before we ask him, and he will take care of us in everything.

Jesus says, "Until now you have asked nothing in my name." Now, that doesn't mean that they haven't prayed before. But what it means is they haven't asked for anything in the name of Jesus. But now ask for and you will receive, that your joy may be full. And isn't that a wonderful thing right there, Christians? Your joy may be full. There's something wonderful about being a Christian engaged in prayer. Because then in that moment, when we know who God is and when we ask Him as our Father for the things that we need and the things that we want, our joy will be complete. Our joy will be filled up, because God delights to give it to us and to take care of us in all things. Prayer is such a wonderful privilege in that way, because God is going to take care of us. And he even knows what we need, even before we ask him.

But Christians, I know how difficult prayer can be. I mean, even I as a pastor struggle with prayer. It's one of the most difficult things that we can do as a Christian because of that sinful nature which still clings to us. So how should we pray? How should we approach God? You know, what does it look like to pray? Well, let me offer a few suggestions for you this day, something that will help us in the discipline of prayer.

One of the first things that I think would be good for us in prayer is to set aside specific times for prayer. Now, we can pray whenever, and we should pray whenever. That's a good thing. But if we leave our prayers only to those times when we might get to it or when we're going to get to it later, it's very easy to just not pray at all, isn't it? Because there's always going to be something else demanding our attention. There's always going to be work. There's always going to be chores. There's always going to be our desires, our hungers, whatever it might be. Something is going to get in the way. But when we set aside time for God, the same way that we set aside time for work, or set aside time to eat, we can focus in on the things that we need to do. And that will help us in our prayers so that we don't always put it off and, you know, we'll get to it later. But we will be in the things of God at the time that we have set so that we will seek Him in that time.

But once we have set the time for it, we should also set aside a place to pray. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to pray or to think about God in this place? I think we've kind of felt that over the past several weeks, haven't we? It's hasn't been quite the same when we were out there in the parking lot! But when we're in here, it makes a difference. You can feel it. But when we set aside that kind of space for God, whatever that might be in our homes, the same place that we go to time and time again, that can help us pray too for the same reason that being in here helps us to pray.

But once we have set a time and once we have a set place, what should we pray for? What kinds of things should we bring to God? Well, everything. Are you worried about something? Pray about it. Are you excited about something? Pray about it. Are you trying to figure out what you should do? Pray about it. Or even just giving thanks to God, saying, "God, thank you for the things that you have done. Thank you for the blessings that you have given me." Or even just praising him for who he is and all of the wonderful things that he is in himself. When we do those things, not just asking him for things all the time, I think we will find that that warms our hearts for prayer. And on top of that too, we can use devotions to help us pray. But the Scriptures themselves are inexhaustible. They are wonderful. When we are in the Scriptures and pray from the Scriptures, we will never run out of things to pray.

But maybe we still feel at a loss. Maybe we still feel kind of dry. We're not really sure what to do. Pray about that too! Say, "Lord, help me pray." The Lord will answer that prayer. Because Christians, God has promised you great things in prayer. He has promised to listen. He has promised to be there. And he has promised that whatever you ask in the name of Jesus, the Father will give to you. What a glorious thing that is, to have such a gracious God who is never too busy for us! He's always going to be with us

to take care of is.

Will you pray with me? Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you this day for the many blessings that you have given to us, that we are able to gather together in this place and the blessing also of your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would watch over us as we go about our daily lives this week. May all things be done to your glory and in your name. Help us always to pray in you, O Lord, so that we may seek you in all things, knowing that you are always ready to hear and just as ready to answer. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus, to whom be all glory, power, and honor, a now and forever. Amen.