

Man in the Mirror Bible Study
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WHY PRAY?
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This morning we are going to begin a three-week series on prayer, and I'm going to lay out for you how it's going to work. We're going to do three messages. One message, the message today, will be on why we should pray. Next week we'll do a message on how prayer works, and the third week, what prayer does. That's a little paradigm for you, so you'll know what's going on.

This morning: Why Pray? Sometimes it's obvious that you need to pray. I had one of those occasions this week. If you were here the last time I spoke, you know I was having a little bit of an e-mail problem. We got that little e-mail problem fixed, only to be hit with a lightning strike at our home. We then went away for a one-week vacation, and when we returned, sure enough all my prayers had not worked and the computer was still broken. I turned that thing on and couldn't get it to send and receive faxes or e-mail, and then things just started breaking down. Before long, I couldn't get the cursor to move. A few more hours went by and little ghost figures, and I don't think they were holy ghost figures, were coming up on my screen of different software applications that I had already closed. Then the speed of the machine began to slowly grind down. I had the very distinct impression that this was like one of those old Spanish galleons in search of gold. That's what a computer is, right? That it hit a coral reef and was breaking up, and now the waves were pounding against the back of the ship, and the ship was breaking up. By Wednesday afternoon, I felt like the ship had broken up, and I was holding on to a little piece of flotsam waiting for some ship to come by and rescue me. It's been a very fascinating week.

This little device is a piece of micro circuitry which we took out yesterday, and there is a little tiny thing over here, I don't know exactly what it is maybe a capacitor, or something like that, but anyway, it's been blown into about 10 million pieces. When you have situations like this, it is obvious that you pray. I've been praying my brains out this week hoping to get that situation fixed.

You know, most of the things that happen to us in life don't have the sense of urgency that we should pray about them. This morning I want to talk to you about why we should always pray because the Bible says we should pray without ceasing. The Bible says we should pray on all occasions, yet often we don't. Why should we pray? I am going to talk about three things this morning: what happens when we don't pray; what happens when we do pray and, why we don't pray.

First, what happens when we don't pray? I want to look at Joshua, Chapter 9 with you. Let's begin at Verse 1. Let me set up this passage, this text for us. We need to pray because of what happens when we don't pray. The Israelites, under Joshua's leadership, had gone into Canaan, and they had a couple of staggering successes at Jericho and Ai. The word of these staggering successes got around to the people who lived there. Some of the people were terrified, well, all the people were terrified, but some of the people who were terrified had an idea it was the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites hoisted a ruse, and they came to the Israelite leaders with a very unusual request. With that set up, let's take a look at the passage, Joshua, Chapter 9, Verse 1: "Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things," the successes at Jericho and Ai, "those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the 'ites'...) they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel. However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done at Jericho and Ai, they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, 'We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.'" You know the Israelites were not going to make any treaties with any other people. They were an agent of God's judgment against the wickedness of these people. "The men of Israel said to the Hivites, 'But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you? We are your servants', they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, 'Who are you and where do you come from?' They answered, 'Your servants have come from a very distant

country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him..." and goes through all those reports.

Now down to Verse 13, "And these wineskins that we that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey." Now watch what happens in Verse 14: "The men of Israel sampled their provisions but they did not inquire of the Lord." In the New Living translation, it says, "But they examined the bread, but they did not consult with the Lord." Some of your other versions may say something similar. As a result of that, because they did not inquire of the Lord, they did not consult with the Lord, they didn't pray, Joshua made a treaty with them. Three days later, Verse 16, they found out that these Gibeonites were not from a far off land, but they were neighbors, and they could not undo the treaty, and they were not able to do what they were supposed to do and these Gibeonites became the water carriers and the wood cutters of Israel; they became the servants of the people of Israel.

Why do we need to pray? We need to pray because of what happens if we don't pray. Watch this. Even when you are at your very best, you are likely to look at the data and still come to the wrong conclusion. The big idea this morning: When we are at our best, we are likely to look at the data and still come to the wrong conclusion. It happens all the time.

I have a couple, they're friends, and I like both of them very much. But, after ten years of tumult in their marriage, and it was she who was really causing the tumult, he was really seeking to reconcile, be faithful, and do all the things he was supposed to do. She decided that she needed to get a divorce so she could find God. She decided she needed to get a divorce because she wanted to get closer to God and being married to this man was keeping her from having a relationship with God. I asked her if she wanted to engage in an e-mail conversation about this. She said, "yes." I wrote her and I said, "Well, let's get a few things matters up front. I'd like for you to tell me what is your understanding of scripture about marriage, and what is your view about Biblical authority." Never heard from her again. Because, you see, once a person decides or is confronted with a decision about whether or not they will submit to Biblical authority, this is the turning point decision in the life of a believer.

Well, to make a long story short, and it's a fascinating story both long and short, they got divorced. Time went by and he found someone else, and she came to God. Through this whole process she ended up becoming very discouraged about what she had done, and she had a genuine conversion experience and Christ found her and drug her into the kingdom. She is absolutely a committed Christian today. She realizes that she had made a mistake because she did not inquire of the Lord. Then she wanted to reconcile her marriage. The problem was, it was too late. He had already given his heart to another woman. She, basically, operated out of her own best thinking, like a lot of us do, believers and non believers alike, operate out of our own best thinking, and the result of that is, the point, the big idea is, even when we are at our very best in our human wisdom and our best thinking, we are likely, very likely, and we tend to look at the data and still come to the wrong conclusion.

I've said it here many times, says the wisdom of the years is confusing. With that situation, that's a marriage. You look at making an investment, and it doesn't work out. You look at taking a job, and it doesn't work out. You look at parenting your children in a particular way, and it doesn't seem to work out. Did you inquire of the Lord? Did you inquire of the Lord? Why should we pray? Because when we don't our tendency is to look at the data and come to the wrong conclusion.

So, that's what happens when we don't pray. What happens if we do pray? Exciting things. I want us to look at a number of passages if you are adept at flipping through your Bible, you may want to follow along. If not, you may want to just listen. Some of you may want to write down these verses for a longer look later. We are going to look at several very briefly. Turn with me, if you would, to Matthew, Chapter, 6, Verse 8. We're done in Joshua. The Bible is full of promises that God makes to answer prayer. The Bible is chock full of these promises. We're going to look at a number of them. We've just looked at what happens when we don't pray, now let's look at what happens when we do pray.

Matthew, Chapter 6, Verse 8 says, "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Point. God knows what we need before we ask him. Go to Chapter 7, Verse 7, and while you're doing that, let me mention that James, Chapter 4, Verse 2 says, "You have not because you ask not." God knows what we need before we ask Him, and we don't have because we don't ask. Chapter 7, Verse 7: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." So ask, and you will receive. Do you see anything else that you need to do here? Ask, and you might receive; seek and half of you who seek will find, knock and occasionally the door will be opened. It's the issue of Biblical authority. This is either true or isn't. Whether you believe it or not, it doesn't make any difference. Even if you do believe it, and it is not true, that doesn't make it true, right? If this is true, it's true forensically. I mean it is true. The question is, and the question every man has to decide, not do I believe Christianity in a general way, but do I believe Christianity specifically as the way God has presented it to us in the Bible? That's a decision every man has to make. So ask and you will receive.

Go to Matthew, Chapter 21, Verse 22. This is a little parable about the withering of the fig tree. Verse 22 says, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." I'm just reading the Bible here, okay. This is just the Bible, only the Bible. So, ask and you will receive; believe, and you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

Now go to John, Chapter 14, Verse 14; Mathew, Mark, Luke, John. We're looking at the question why should we pray? One reason we should pray is because of what happens when we don't pray. If we don't pray our tendency will be, even when we're at our very best, to look at the data and come to the wrong conclusion. The reason that we should pray, and what we're looking at now, is that God promises that he will answer prayer. Chapter 14, Verse 14: Jesus again says, "You may ask me for anything in my name and I will think about it. You may ask for anything in my name, and I will do it." So ask, believe, ask in faith, in my name, ask in faith in His name, and then look at Chapter 15, Verse 7. This is the vine and the branches story, and it says, "If you remain in me," I like the word abide which is the King James Version meaning the same thing, "if you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and I'll tell you to take a hike." Ask whatever you wish, and what does it say? "It will be given to you." I am just reporting here, okay? I don't really care, I mean I do care, but in some sense I don't really care if you believe me or not. But I do care if you believe Jesus or not. You understand what I'm saying. I do care a lot though if you believe Jesus or not. It's either true, or it isn't, and you either believe it or you don't. Everyone has to make their own call on this. It comes to the issue of Biblical authority.

So why pray? We should pray because even when we're at our very best we will tend to look at the data and still come to the wrong conclusion, but God wants to give us whatever we ask for in prayer believing in His name while we abide in Him.

In the Prayer of Jabez, which now I think is now four million copies, number one on the U.S.A. Today list this week, number one New York Times, number one every list and someday I'll tell you the story of how this book came into being which is a fascinating story all by itself. I've got the inside story to give you on that during this series. In that book Bruce Wilkinson, the author, tells the story, it's been around, but a man named Jones dies and goes to Heaven, and he's looking around on the streets paved of gold and the beautiful mansions, and he sees a big warehouse over there. As it looks a little out of place, he says to Peter, who's kind of giving him the guided tour, "Peter, what's in that warehouse over there." Peter said, "Oh, you don't want to know." He said, "Why wouldn't I want to know?" So Peter takes him over to the warehouse and they go inside and there are all these beautiful presents; all these beautiful white boxes with red bows. Rows and rows and rows. He said, "What is this?" Before Peter could answer he took off looking for row J. His name begins with J. He finds a box with his name on it. He said, "No, no, don't open that up. You don't want to see what's inside." He said, "No, I do want to see what's inside. It's got my name on it." He lifts open the box, looks down and gasps. Peter had heard this many times before. In the box were all the blessings that God had wanted to give Jones but he never asked. Do you understand this?

Christians get jaded and cynical and they stop believing that God wants to bless them, and they stop believing that God answers prayer. Do you believe that God wants to bless you, and do you believe that God answers prayer? These are huge decisions that you have to make. Let me add, if you say, I'll make it later, and you walk out of here and forget it, you've made it. You have to make those decisions.

Finally, why we don't pray. Here's why we don't pray; one way of saying it. Let's just imagine that you, for whatever reason, have the ability to direct the behavior by sending an e-mail to the following people. You can get these people to do anything that you want, anytime that you want them to do it: The President of the United States, send him an e-mail, he does it; all the members of Congress and all the members of the Supreme Court; all the CEO's of the Fortune 500 companies are at your beck and call. All you have to do is send them an e-mail, tell them what to do, ask them to do something, and they will do it. You can fire off an e-mail to Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw, Dan Rather and Britt Hume and they will do whatever you ask them to do. You can fire off an e-mail to anyone of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and order a strike on your enemies, and they will instantly do exactly what you command them to do; ask them to do. You can fire off an e-mail to the managing editors of the Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Washington Post, and they will run whatever headline you ask them to run in their newspaper. You have, therefore, control of all of the political, economic, social, cultural and military forces of this nation. You have that kind of power. Every one of those people I just mentioned reign at the pleasure of the king of kings. They come and they go. We don't remember their names. We don't even know all of their names today. The God who arranged the entire cosmos over here on this little tiny planet, earth, these little minions reign at his pleasure. You don't have to go to those people to get what you want, you see? Because all those people I just mentioned, they're little small potatoes. You can go to the one who appointed those people; gave those people the power, the right and privilege of having those positions, and you can ask Him for whatever it is that you want in His name, in faith, and abiding in Jesus Christ, He will give you what you ask.

The problem, men, is not that we don't have enough power, it's that we have too much. God must put limits on our prayers or we would destroy ourselves and everyone else around us. We don't pray often because we don't think we have enough power. The reality is, men, you have too much power, and this is why a gracious God puts limits on what he will give you in prayer because if He didn't you would destroy yourself. I know that, in my case, I spent the first twenty years of my adult life working and praying to achieve that which would have destroyed me, and then I was disappointed when I was spared. A lot of us end up being disappointed that we're not getting things when it's by grace that God is not giving them to us. Because, even though in our heart of hearts, and we're so selfish, we think we're abiding in Him, we think we're praying in His name, we think we're asking, we think we're believing, we think we have faith and we're not doubting, but if that were true, we wouldn't have asked for that particular thing. So God has to say "no."

As we close this morning, what is the burden that's in your heart? What is the blessing that you would like in your life? What is the thing that you would have God do for you if you would, if you believe that He would? The question, men, will you go ahead and receive that now from Him or you send it up to be put in the white box with the red ribbon? Our choice.

Let's pray:

Father, I know that I don't pray because I just don't have enough faith. Lord, I know that I am not receiving all that you have for me because I don't have enough faith. I need to abide more in you. I need to be in your name, but I also need to ask. So, Lord, I am going to take a moment now and I am going to invite each of you men to insist in boldness. You have the power. Trusting that the Lord will limit that if it's something that will destroy you, go ahead and ask Him for whatever it is that is the desire of your heart. Do this right now. Come Holy Spirit, come Jesus. Lord, give these men what they're asking for and believe in prayer. Lord, we ask these things in your name. Lord, it is our desire to abide in Jesus.

Lord, I pray that right now in this moment that you would do something supernatural in the lives of these men, that you would release all the power that you have and bless them. Give them the desires of God. What I pray in the days and weeks ahead is that there will be a flood of reports coming back of how you have answered these prayers. And in faith, Lord, I am going out on a limb and, Lord, I am standing on your word, and I am claiming these promises to these men this morning to depend upon you and to look to you. Amen

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