

A STUDY ABOUT PRAYER

Harmony M.B.C. Special Study

Begun, October 22, 2006

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Jeremiah 33:3

During a sermon a few months ago I made a statement to this congregation that if we here at Harmony were suddenly restricted as to what we could do as a church, and only allowed one spiritual exercise, I would choose prayer over all else. Someone might think that it would be more important to preach and teach the word than to pray; I say that preaching and teaching would be useless without prayer. Someone might say that witnessing would be the most important thing. I would answer that witnessing for Christ without showering those efforts with prayer would ensure that no spiritual seed would ever germinate from all our witnessing efforts. Someone might think that gathering to worship as we do would be the most important. I would answer that gathering to worship would be no worship at all without the sanctifying power of prayer to consecrate such worship services.

And so, this morning we want to begin a bible study on prayer. We want to make it a study because I believe that the most powerful, effective, organized, emboldened, useful churches of Jesus Christ are those which have a powerful, effective, bold, unified prayer life. I believe that whatever a church will be is determined by the height, breadth, and depth of its prayer effort. I believe that every deficit that a church may experience in any spiritual or material need can be overcome and eradicated by prayer. I believe that spiritual deficits, and material deficits that are not given of God as a gift for trial, are caused by a deficit in the prayer life of a church. May God help us as a church to experience a total revival in prayer effort by the time this study is over.

We will be looking at the following topics about prayer during this study:

1. The Necessity of Prayer
2. The Power of Prayer
3. The Elements of Prayer
4. The Objects of Prayer

If God leads beyond that, we will continue, but these are our topics as of today. We will attempt to look at each topic during one session. If this is not possible, we will extend a topic into the next session. This could cause us to have more than 4 sessions. We will be holding the study sessions during the Sunday School hour and then during the evening service. If we are able to complete one topic per session, the 4th session will of course, be held during the afternoon of the Fifth Sunday Fellowship service on the 29th (if the Lord wills).

I. THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

It is the God-ordained means of getting things from the Lord; Jesus admonition (“ask, seek, knock” Mat. 7:7-8)

- As God asked Solomon (**II Chron 1:7**), “Ask what I shall give thee...” so this is an invitation from our Savior to ask what He might give us.

- **Psalms 2:8** begins with “Ask of me and I will give to thee...”which is the divine commitment from the God of heaven

Prayer is necessary because it is a scriptural maxim that we have not because we ask not. (James 4:2)

- If we lack something which we need, it is because we have not asked for it
- Too often, we are too distracted by life’s events or maybe even too proud to ask of the Lord
- Asking of God humbles the soul
- Asking of God reminds the asker how great God is
- Asking of God provokes the seeker to evaluate his or her own condition of soul and life

Prayer is a necessity because it is the communication link to God - Our text verse (Call unto me, and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not); also Jeremiah 29:12-14 - (God is telling Israel that after 70 years of captivity, He will do them good and cause them to return to their land and He follows that news with this: (12) Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.

When David sings about approaching God in Psalms 95:2, he says “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving...” Which is the kind of prayer that makes our souls aware of all the God has done for us!

- Any human who wishes to talk to God must pray
- No communication with God is possible without prayer
- The desire to talk to God can be measured by the frequency of prayer
 - In **Psalms 5:3**, David says: My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up.
 - David began early to communicate with God
 - He committed the freshness of his rested self to it
 - He considered it important enough to make it one of his first endeavors
 - He acknowledged God and consulted with Him before beginning matters of state
- The responses of God to people can be measured by the frequency of prayer going up to Him

It is an essential element of spiritual life -

Luke 22:-39-40; Jesus went to the Mount of Olives on the night He was arrested, as the bible says He was wont to do - He had a habit of going there to pray (Mat. 14:23 tells us about that habit); His spiritual life as the representative Man demanded it; He could not do less than spend special time in prayer to God; So, He was on the mount praying; he brought Peter, James, and John with Him; He said something there to them that tells us a great truth about how essential prayer is to spiritual life; in v. 40 He said to them, “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.”

- This was a prayer watch
- The people of God should conduct prayer watches
- Critical spiritual events or crises in our lives should set off a prayer watch
- But notice something even deeper than that; notice that He admonished them to watch and pray in order not to enter into temptation:

- Every time we enter into temptation it will be at a time when we have not been praying
- Every time we find ourselves in a state of spiritual slumber or spiritual laziness it will be when we have not been praying
- Every time we find ourselves out of shape spiritually it will be when we have not been praying
- Every time a calamity catches us unaware it is at a time when our lives have drifted off from a habit of praying and we have gotten careless about talking to our heavenly Father
 - Spiritual health is dependent on praying
 - Spiritual readiness is dependent on praying
 - Awareness of spiritual danger is dependent on praying
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As an essential element of spiritual life, prayer will stabilize our spiritual health and **will enable us to be consistent in our lifestyle for God: Dan 6:10** Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he **kneeled upon his knees three times a day**, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, **as he did formerly**.

It is the primary communication outlet of the spiritual you

1Cor 14:15 What is it then? **I will pray with the spirit**, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

Essential because it is the means for growing in understanding about all things: James 1:5 “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

Prayer is essential for humans. It is the force and link which connects us in this carnal existence to the realm of the spiritual and to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We must pray to get those things from God which will mature us into adult Christians and into useful servants of the Lord. May the Lord give us a deep and abiding desire and willingness to pray without ceasing.

Sunday Night, Oct 22, 2006

II. THE POWER OF PRAYER

Read Jeremiah 33:3

As proponents of the sovereign grace of God and of His omnipotence and self-existence, we teach, and rightly so, that God does as He pleases in the heavens and on earth and none can stay His hand or say unto Him “what doest thou?” In holding this forth as a doctrine, we sometimes miss a very important aspect of God’s activity amongst His creatures. That is, that He works through agencies and agents and in so doing He performs a lot of things as a result of or in concert with other things that He sets in motion or that He inspires and directs. This is the case in relation to the power of prayer. We want to focus on just a couple of facts about the power of prayer tonight, because in those few things we hope to present the crucial facts that we need to know about the power of prayer. Then, if we learn and become convinced of these facts, we will be armed with an element of faith that has the potential to change our prayer lives forever.

To properly help us get oriented about the unimaginable power of prayer, let’s look at a couple of bible references and examine what they are really telling us:

God’s statement in Ex. 32:10 is an indicator of the power of prayer: “let me alone”

The parable of Luke 18:3-5 attests also to the power of prayer

God can be moved by prayers of His saints

God acknowledges that He is influenced by the prayers of His saints

God has bound Himself to act in response to prayer and He will not act in certain areas except as how His actions are called for through prayer:

Abraham and Abimelech (**Genesis 20:2-7**);

Job and his friends (**Job 42:8**)

I Samuel 1:2, 5, 11, 19, 20 - Hannah has been made childless by the Lord / Hannah has been made to conceive by the Lord after she prays

Samuel prays down thunder and rain during a period of no rain (**I Sam. 12:17-18**)

Solomon’s prayer and God’s answer: (**I Kings 8:22-52; 9:3**): Solomon presents a great list of request for the Lord to perform in Ch. 8. In Ch. 9:3 the scripture says: “And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou has made before me...”

Hezekiah receives added years (**Isaiah 38:1-5**)

Prayer commits God to work for us

II Sam. 22:4, 7, 8, 14, 15, 18

Joshua 10:12-13

James 5:17-18 Elijah was a man subject to like passions **as we are**, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and **it rained not** on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

Acts 4:23-31 - The prayers of the saints brings the power of the Holy Spirit’s presence on them.

Prayer results in changes in the world about us (all the things I said above prove it)

Prayer results in changes in unsaved men, in conditions, in circumstances, in natural order,

Prayer changes us.

Prayer alters us as the intimate communion with God on Sinai caused Moses’ face to shine (Ex. 34:

29 & 35). Christ's glorious time with God on the Mount of Transfiguration: Matthew 17:2 "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

People cannot spend time in communion with God without **experiencing changes** which begin within and move outward. **Prayer is a communion with God which is an inward exercise** that seizes the soul and draws the praying person into close proximity to the things that belong to the spiritual world. Even though we continue to live in this fleshly body, through frequent and consistent prayer, spiritual change occurs within us that makes us more like our Lord.

Prayer broadens the scope of influence that we have around us:

Eph 6:18-20 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; (19) **And for me, that utterance may be given** unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, (20) For which I am an ambassador in bonds: **that therein I may speak boldly**, as I ought to speak.

The result of prayer for Hannah in I Samuel 1 was (as is stated in v. 18 ... "So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her **countenance was no more sad.**" (More than just a change in the looks of a person here...that change in her look spoke of a change in her heart, even before she learned that she was to bear a child)

Acts 27: 35-36 - Paul prays and the beleaguered people on the ship cheer up though they are about to become shipwrecked.

Sunday Morning, Sunday School Hour; October 29, 2006

III. THE ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

Read Jeremiah 33:3

Spiritual prayer to the Almighty God is a necessity for believers in Christ. There are many reasons why this is so, but primarily it is because:

- It is the God-ordained means of getting things from the Lord
- it is a scriptural maxim that we have not because we ask not
- it is the communication link to God
- It is an essential element of spiritual life
- will enable us to be consistent in our lifestyle for God
- It is the primary communication outlet of the spiritual you
- it is the means for growing in understanding about all things

Spiritual prayer is powerful prayer because, among other things:

- God has bound Himself to act in response to prayer and He will not act in certain areas except as how His actions are called for through prayer
- Prayer commits God to work for us
- Prayer changes us
- Prayer broadens the scope of influence that we have around us

So prayer is essential for us and it has power in our lives, and power with God, when we conduct it properly. The Lord allows us a lot of latitude in prayer as long as it is an outgrowth of a spiritual desire or burden within us. God has no communion with rote prayers read from books as a litany or as a religious custom or some kind of incantation. Having a consistent habit of prayer is an excellent spiritual practice, but doing it only because it is a habit will become much like any other fixed habit...it will become an unconscious repetition with no connection at all to spiritual matters; and this sort of religious observance the Lord detests. It is worthwhile for us to take a look at what the true spiritual elements of prayer are and to seek the Lord's guidance, and school ourselves in how to insert these elements into our communications with the Most High. With all that said, we want to look at our next subject on prayer: The elements of prayer. May God help us to understand those elements and their importance.

- Intensity of sincerity and earnestness
(**James 5:16** "...the **effectual fervent** prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (Then in the 16th verse, as we read last week, we are told that Elijah prayed **earnestly** that it not rain and it did not rain for 3.5 years.)
Jonah 2:2 And (Jonah) said, I **cried by reason of mine affliction** unto the LORD, and he heard me; **out of the belly of hell** cried I, *and* thou heardest my voice.
- Intensity of piety or devotion (commitment to praying & commitment to God -
Heb. 11:6 - Faith is commitment to God & commitment to praying.
Phil. 4:6 - Be careful for nothing; but in **every thing** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.
I Tim 2:8 - I will therefore that **men pray every where**, lifting up holy hands, **without**

wrath and doubting.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

(“we pray as we live, we live as we pray”)

- **Focused** (scattered subject matter breeds shallowness; focusing urgently on specifics not only builds fervency and a sense of great need, but it focuses God on those things which are deeply burdening our hearts)
Job said in **Job 23:4** “I would order my cause before Him...”
Focusing on God gives us the kind of spiritual humility and sense of His greatness that is needed to fully appreciate what kind of business we are doing
Psalms 5:3 My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I **direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.**

Prayer is the acting out of faith

- **Sense of dependence - Psalms 86:1** A Prayer of David. Bow down thine ear, O LORD hear me: for **I am poor and needy.**
Psa 86:6-7 Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. **In the day of my trouble** I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.
Psa 142:5-6 I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my refuge *and* my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: **deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I.**
- **Humility** - see **II Chron. 7:14**

Part 2 of Section III. Delivered Sunday afternoon Following the Fifth-Sunday Fellowship Lunch

- **Repentance with fruit**- see again II Chron. 7:14 “...and turn from their wicked ways...”
- **Must be a whole-hearted effort: Jeremiah 29:13-14** - And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me **with all your heart.** (14) **And I will be found of you,** saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.
 - A lack of heartfelt effort dishonors God
 - No lazy, careless, kind of praying gets God’s attention - See **Acts 14:21-23:** And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, (22) Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. (23)] And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had **prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.
 - See **Matthew 17:21** Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by **prayer and fasting.**

People who find themselves captive of coldness, indifference, spiritual lassitude, should stir themselves up to call unto God with a seeking that is with all their hearts. He will be found of us when that spirit of praying assists us.

- Prayers should be rational and have basis in God's promises: use Moses' prayer for the preserving of Israel in **Ex. 32:9-14** to talk about the elements of reason and argument
- Must be broad and unselfish (**I Tim 2:1-2**)
- Should be large in scope and expectation
- The pray-er must be shaped by his own prayers
- In a church, prayer must be equally pursued by the pulpit and the pew
- The prayers of the church must shape its members
- The prayers of the members must shape the church
- Founded on the rules of God (Must be in conformity with God's will)

See God tell Jeremiah not to pray for the Israelites - **Jer. 11:11-14; 14:10-11**

The **question** of "What is God's will?" always comes up. We sometimes labor over what God's will is in the matter of what we pray for:

The will of God can be known in our lives. It becomes more and more clear the more we are obedient to Him, and reject the word system:

See **Romans 2:17-18** (Paul seems to be suggesting here that knowing the word of God is all that is needed to know the will of God)

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Prayer itself assists us to be in the will of God in things, including prayer:

Col 4:12 Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always **laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect** (perfect in the sense of complete) **and complete** (make replete; cram full; level up) **in all the will of God.**

The elements of prayer are important as part of our prayer life. We want to use the elements of prayer in God's approved way as part of our duty and privilege in calling upon Him. Without a sense of what it takes to pray effectively, we may find ourselves "beating the air" as the apostle Paul stated it in I Cor. 9:26. God will accept any prayer of His people offered from the heart in humility and subjection to Him, and the elements we have looked at are simply part of that kind of approach to God. They are not a recipe that will ensure answered prayer; they are components of prayer that God will not fail to answer.

Sunday Evening November 4th, 2006

IV. THE OBJECTS OF PRAYER

Read Jeremiah 33:3

Some might think that it is a no-brainer as to what or who the objects of our prayers should be. But really that is far from the truth. I think it is safe to say that we have people in America who are professed believers that make the objects of their prayers to be something that God will not in holiness or mercy grant a request for. There is really no end to the objects which should fall under the attention of our prayers. As we were reminded in part I of our study, God has instructed us to pray about everything: **Phil. 4:6** - Be careful for nothing; but in **every thing** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

To provide a list of objects of prayer is to limit both the believer's scope of praying and to limit the areas of God's meeting with us through prayer. What I will do however, is provide a few things that are definitely to be the objects of your prayers, and some observations about those objects and our praying relative to them.

Objects which are living creatures:

Preachers (to include missionaries) and teachers

Rom 15:30 Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;

(Paul, about the ways that contentious men tried to hinder his ministry): Phil 1:19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Congregations

Believers by name

Act 12:5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Rom 1:8-9 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. Rom 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

Col 4:3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

Our nation

Rom 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

Our nation's leaders

1Tim 2:1-2 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may

lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

Family

Friends

Enemies

Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

The objective of your prayers for the objects of your prayers should be:

- To focus the Lord on the object - bring the object before the Lord
- To focus the object on the Lord - bring the Lord before the object
- To plead the case for the object
- To reveal the judge to the object
- To seek mercy or grace, or both for the object
- To provoke the object to seek for mercy or grace, or both

Objects Which Are Products of Creatures:

- Your behavior - **Ephesians 4:1** I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye **walk worthy** of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
1Th 2:12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.
- Your Speech - **Col 3:17** And whatsoever ye do **in word** or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.
- The behavior of your brothers and sisters in Christ
- The speech of your brothers and sisters in Christ
- Your duties (secular and spiritual)
- Your Christian brother's or sister's duties (secular and spiritual)

Note: people's behavior, speech, and attention to duties **IS their testimony**. This calls for careful attention to prayer.

Objects which are inanimate or not flesh and blood:

- Yours and others possessions -
The rule of life for possessions should be modeled after the warning given to us in **Mat 6:24**: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye **cannot serve God and mammon.**"
- Yours and others needs - See **Matthew 6:11-13**
11 Give us this day our daily bread
12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.
- Yours and others productivity - see **Col. 1:9-11**
9. For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the **knowledge of his will** in all **wisdom and spiritual understanding**;

10. That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, **being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;**

11. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto **all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;**

- Yours and others recreation - see **I Cor. 6;12** “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”
- What you and others eat and drink
1Cor 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

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