

“Finding our Future in our Past and Living the Eternal in the Temporal”
2 Chronicles 20:1-30

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 Title: Jehoshaphat sought the LORD through prayer
 Text: 2 Chronicles 20:5-13
 Theme: Because prayer is relational, we should seek God through prayer.

Introduction:

This morning I would like us to consider the third of four ways that express how Jehoshaphat sought the Lord.

Jehoshaphat saw prayer as a means of talking with God. It was the means through which he declared his complete and utter dependency on Him. Jehoshaphat came to a point where he had no other option than to seek His God through prayer.

We have made prayer something it is not. It is neither mystical nor complex. Prayer is a means of communicating with God. Prayer is simple talking to God wherever and whenever you are so inclined. Prayer has many forms and expressions and one of the expressions of prayer is the cry of utter dependency. **Prayer neither merits favor nor impresses God. Prayer is not for God but for His people.** We pray because we are desperate. Repentance, fasting, and prayer have a way of reprioritizing our lives. They force us to note what is primary and what is secondary. **Our existence does not consist of things but of God.** Prayer is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that He is working in us and through us to those around us.

As an individual I am called to pray and as the pastor of this fellowship and a member of the elder council I am calling this fellowship to church wide prayer. Why would we pray? **Prayer is not a declaration of our commitment or devotion but of our contrition and desperation.** We pray because we are a needy people.

Prayer, like any Spiritual Discipline, is a work of the Holy Spirit. I always believe I need to repeat myself lest I am misunderstood. So despite being overly repetitive, I will begin with a short summary.

The works of the Holy Spirit are as diversified and incomprehensible as the Holy Spirit Himself. Prayer is an expression of His work in us and through us for the accomplishing of His eternal purpose (Rom. 8:26; Eph. 6:18; Jude 20). We can offer ourselves up to pray as a discipline, but unless and until it is energized by the Holy Spirit it is but a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. Prayer is no more or less important than any other of the Holy Spirit's workings.

Prayer is half of a conversation. Bible reading is the other. Prayer and Bible study are two halves of one whole. In prayer, I speak to God. In Bible study, God speaks to me. The union between the two is so interwoven that neither one can be fully expressed in the absence of the other. Bible study lends fuel to prayer and prayer

makes Bible study strongly relational. With that said, let us consider the idea of prayer in the letters of Paul.

There are four questions I would like us to consider as it relates to prayer that I hope will guide us in prayer and stimulate us to pray so that it is a regular expression of our relationship with God. First, what is prayer?

I. What is prayer?

Prayer is our communion with God. We have made prayer mystical and methodical when it is suppose to be friendly and spontaneous. When prayer is defined by pattern and form, it becomes a speech or presentation rather than a conversation between two friends. Although we are addressing our Creator, Lord, and Savior, Jesus was clear in that we no longer are spoken to as servants but as friends (John 15:15) and our introduction before God is marked by boldness and confidence (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Heb. 4:11-16). There is a liberty and freedom that is to exist in our conversation with God. **It is a throne of grace before which we appear. It is not a seat of judgment.**

God is not critically analyzing our conversation as to its content but as to its sincerity and motive. We will not receive a report card from God as to whether or not our prayers measure up to His ideal. In saying this, please do not misconstrue my thoughts. What you pray is important. It is possible to ask amiss (James 4:3). What we pray should be driven by what we know of God and His eternal purpose. It is His purpose that makes me passionate about my prayer life.

This brings us to our second point in our study.

II. Why would I pray?

The question before us is not “Why would we pray,” but rather “Why would we not pray?”

The great American theologian Jonathan Edwards of the early 1700’s made the following observation.

“Prayer is as natural an expression of faith as breathing is of life”

Let me offer two short thoughts as to why we pray.

A. Practically we should pray because . . .

If prayer is a conversation between two friends, then we pray primarily because God is our friend and we are in communion with Him. Prayer is possible because of the Cross. Prayer is the essence of biblical fellowship. Prayer speaks of communion.

B. Theologically we should pray because . . .

God has chosen to use our prayers as a means through which He responds and works out His eternal purpose. **God is not bound by our prayers, but He delights in using our prayers as a means of confirming His presence in our midst.** When we pray we cannot be frustrated by their apparent ineffectiveness. Whether or not God answers our prayers according to our petition lies solely in God's good pleasure not in our ability to pray.

We imagine that effective prayer looks a certain way. However, consider the following pictures of prayer in the Bible.

1. Hannah in the temple (1 Sam. 1:13)
2. Peter walking on water (Matt. 14:30)
3. A father's cry for the healing of his son (Mark 9:24)
4. A bleeding women's prayer for healing (Matt. 9:21)
5. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:42)
6. The disciples praying for Peter's release from jail (Acts 12:5)

Some of the prayers recorded in the Scripture were like our presidential state addresses (2 Chron. 20:5-13), others were private and highly personal.

This brings us to our third point in our study.

III. How should I pray?

Martin Luther, the great reformer of the 1500's, made this important statement concerning prayer.

“Grant that I may not pray alone with the mouth; help me that I may pray from the depths of my heart”

Let us note the prayer of Jehoshaphat. Although Jehoshaphat lived inside of a theocracy (i.e. God governed nation where religion and politics are one and the same), there are still five significant points of immediate application.

A. God reigns over all things created (v. 6)

⁵ “Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD before the new court, ⁶ and he said, "O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You” (2 Chron. 20:5, 6).

This is a non-negotiable truth. As then so also now, God reigns over all things created. We pray to Him because He moves all things in heaven, on earth, and under earth. If God did not reign, then our prayers would be of no eternal significance.

B. Prayer is between friends (v. 7)

⁷ “Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?” (2 Chron. 20:7).

This is also true. We pray to God because we are friends with God.

C. Supplication is built on the promises of God (vv. 8, 9).

⁸ “They have lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary there for Your name, saying, ⁹ ‘Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You (**for Your name is in this house**) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver us.’” (2 Chron. 20:8, 9).

Although what God promised to Israel and what He promises to us is different, there are still biblical promises that we can and should claim when we pray. The work of the church is in fulfillment of His past promises and His future claims. He will be worshipped by people from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation and this is the work in which we are involved as His people. Our prayer to reach our community, our nation, and our world, is in keeping with His eternal purpose.

D. Prayer is often driven by impending destruction and immediate despair (vv. 10-12).

¹⁰ “Now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You did not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), ¹¹ see how they are rewarding us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You have given us as an inheritance. ¹² O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You” (2 Chron. 20:10-12).

This is something everyone everywhere holds in common. We are faced with impending destruction but often we are oblivious to it. Our own self-deception makes us believe we are doing better than we are. Friend, it is only the character of God and His promises that keep us from complete despair.

E. Prayer can involve a public forum (v. 13).

¹³ “All Judah was standing before the LORD, with their infants, their wives and their children” (2 Chron. 20:13).

Public or communal prayer is proper and biblically correct when it is preceded by private and intimate communion with God. It is proper and right for us to cry out to God as a family.

This brings us to our fourth point in our study.

IV. What should I expect from prayer and what should I expect when I pray?

Many of us are inside of relationships that are personal. Before I move forward, let me define intimate. Many of us think intimate means sexual or physical, but intimate means a disclosure of who you are to others. It is making yourself vulnerable. It is honest and transparent. It is not possible for you to be intimate with everyone, but it is hopeful that you are intimate with someone.

Many of us have friends with whom we have intimate dialogue. For many of us, marriage is a conversation between two friends. The content is personal and intimate. Little is asked but much is given and received. There is something within us that resonates deeply when engaged in intimate conversation. To speak openly without fear of correction or condemnation is the essence of intimate relationships.

Intimate conversation puts us out there, it makes us open to humiliation and ridicule, but we are willing to risk everything we are for the sake of this intimacy. You are blessed when you have that opportunity before you and you are a guardian when someone enters into an intimate relationship with you. It is a sacred trust.

You can be this way with God. God will never betray this trust. Prayer is a releasing of soul.

Because prayer is a means through which God works His eternal purpose, we should expect God to make Himself known through prayer. How does God reveal Himself through prayer? Is this something mystical or objective? God reveals Himself through prayer when His Spirit testifies with our spirit. It is subjective, but it is a subjectivity that is a part of our relationship with God through the Spirit. There is an emotional dynamic in prayer and in the Christian life. This is difficult for us to lay hold of at times, but our union with Christ is intellectual, volitional, and emotional.

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here? What is the NEXT STEP?)

Outside of Paul you have such familiar statements as “you have not because you ask not” (James 4:2), and “ask and you will receive” (Matt. 7:7). If prayer is strongly relational, and if the hand of God is opened through prayer, what is keeping us from praying?

In all conversation between two people there are some practical guidelines that are just as applicable in our conversation with God.

First, *be truthful, honest, and transparent.*

God knows your thoughts before you even think them or communicate them verbally. God is not impressed with the kind of language you use. There is no such thing as a prayer language or sound. Tell God everything. Although He already knows what

you are going to say before you say it (you are never informing Him of anything), He delights in hearing you ask.

Second, *be focused, singular, and undistracted.*

Stay focused on the person with whom you are communicating.

Third, *be real, intimate, and sincere.*

Be all there in the moment. Let the person know to whom you are speaking that they are important enough to listen to and speak with.

Fourth, *talk to God like you would the president if he were a personal friend.*

There is an air of respect because He is God, but there is also an informal element because He is your friend. This is why Hebrews 4:12-15 can make so much sense. You are not coming based on your worth, but that of His Son's.

Fifth, *pray for other people.*

God wants us to pray for other people. This stresses the intercessory nature of biblical prayer.

Sixth, *do not become frustrated with your "prayer life."*

The Holy Spirit is the one who enables you to pray. Present yourself for prayer, but always rely on Him to make the time meaningful.

Seventh, *see prayer as a part of a real relationship.*

All relationships crave intimacy, honesty, and transparency. This is no less true of your desire for God.

Eighth, *pray believing that God delights in your prayers and works through your prayers His eternal purpose.*

Ninth, *pray whenever and wherever you feel so inclined.*

Make prayer as natural as breathing and just as necessary.

Finally, *enjoy your communication with God.*

Do not make prayer a thing to be done, but a true labor of love. Pray because you love God. Prayer is one of the great blessings given to believers by God. Use it.

As we consider prayer may it please the Holy Spirit to make us a praying people and thus a praying church. May He continue to receive our intentional desire to give Him all the glory. May it delight God to give us a spirit of prayer and may we see the blessing it is, in Jesus name – Amen.