

WHEN PRAYER IS A STRUGGLE
WHAT TO DO WHEN... SERIES

READING OF THE WORD

Deuteronomy 4:4-7

But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today. ⁵ See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ **For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?**

Prayer

Warm up

You can be seated. My name is Eric Mattie. I get the privilege to bring the Word to you this morning. Let me say on a personal note on behalf of my immediate family, Melanie and the kids , Thank you very much for your prayers, cards and gifts of support during this time that we are dealing with the passing of my mom Jean. This afternoon is the memorial gathering that we as an immediate family are going to have with my Dad. I'm not sure what to expect but your continued prayers in our time of grieving is appreciated.

Introduction:

The title of my message this morning is When We Struggle with Prayer
Throughout the Bible we see renewed appeals and reminders for the lovers of God to have confidence and boldness in approaching God. We do this through prayer.

But many of us struggle with prayer. Why is that? I want to address that issue today.

- So those who are prayer less don't sit condemned and endure the next few minutes, ask God to search your heart.
- Those who are prayer warrior, you probably already have asked God to search your heart you are most likely ready to hear the word this morning, but you too, be open to the Spirit prompting

Now the struggle with prayer can have vary and has vast reasons and excuses.

- For some its simple a head thing, what is prayer about and why should we do it
- For others its a heart issue of sin or pain that trips us up. Or No desire at all
- Still there are some who are just pragmatically stifled they are stuck with where to start or have practical ways to do.

What ever comes to your mind as to why you struggle go ahead, write it down. Acknowledge what you are up against. (Pause and encourage)

But realize that I can't address everyones reason. However the Spirit of God can. I pray that a touch of His Rest will ease your struggle where ever you are at today in your prayer life.

[transition}

There innumerable forms of prayer found throughout the world. So let me clarify when I use the word Prayer Let me tell you what I don't mean

- I don't mean to use it in the ways in which the sociologist who study every culture, tribes, religions- confirm that globally there are attempts to have a form of communication between human and divine realms.
- I also don't mean to use the word prayer like the polytheistic or agnostic religion and spiritualist use it . Buddhist have prayer wheels and Hindus are trying to connect with The Supreme Being to skip out of cycles of reincarnation. Surveys done in first world countries reveal that even non religious, non believing secular atheist pray.
- I'm also not using the word prayer to mean that we try to connect outwardly with something in the cosmos. Or connect inwardly to mystically change their consciousness and obtain peace.

So that is what I don't mean when I use the word prayer.

To understand the pervasive striving in prayer in these ways reveal something biblical whether all people secular or spiritual, agnostic or atheistic want to admit it or not:

It reveals Biblically speaking that all humans are created in the image of God as we are told that in Gen 1:26,27. And Being image bearers of God means that in our living we reflect and relate to God.

Simply put we are designed for fellowship with God.

A lot of people mistakenly believe that God created us to have fellowship with him because God was lonely and needs love. That is not the case.

- God has always had a perfect friendship within himself as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit adore and love and are profoundly happy with each other they lack nothing.
- God created us not to get love and joy- he had this.
- God who in His nature is others orientated to the very core--- created us to have fellowship with him because he wants to share the joy he has.

The invitation to enter into prayer is our way of entering into the happiness and satisfaction and perfection of God Himself. Our talking to God is answering that invitation in found in Revelation. It's the familiar picture of Jesus knocking outside of a door

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Revelation 3:20

- While this verse is misunderstood to be a call to unbelievers, in ancient times an invitation to dining was an offer of friendship- that is intimate communion with Jesus. Prayer is the response that!

To dive deeper into the heart of why we struggle with prayer I want to address 3 areas. Not exhaustive as a list, but I wanted to start somewhere and let God do the rest.

When prayer is a struggle, the Bible reminds us,

1. Who God Is

Have you ever opened the Bible to read something and then you close it. Then another time you search your bible app for a key word and you scroll through it and you find a verse that you never know was in the Scriptures before?

That happened to me this week.

And I don't mean like it's a different english translation that worded a familiar passage in a different way.

For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? Deuteronomy 4:7

Here's my confession- not embarrassed by it rather I'm excited by it.

I've read Deuteronomy, I don't remember that verse in years past going through Bible reading plans.

I have underlined verses throughout that book that impacted me. But not that one

I think this is an exciting verse because I read it for the first time this week... I've read Deuteronomy and I've missed this verse. (ha)

Point: I mean here is Moses giving this speech to the nation of Israel about obeying the law of God. One of the reasons he appeals as to why they should obey his commands is the reality that the Lord there God is unlike every other "g"od in that **He is near them- when they call out to him.**

Now understand Israel always had access to the Lord in prayer as His presence was symbolized by the tabernacle in the center of the camp and the pillar of cloud over the tabernacle.

Isn't that amazing!

Why am I so excited about this.

Preach: Because I'm talking about Prayer today.

And I've been doing a class on improving your prayer life that we just wrapped up last week.

And we've been in this time as a family of God emphasizing being a praying church and developing a heart that prays more frequently and sincerely and fervently asking big things of God. To have our praying be more Word and Spirit centered.

And I just read a verse I don't remember reading before in all the studying and reading I do.

And I hear the cross references in my own mind of the verses I do remember connecting the dots in my heart.

I hear...

Romans 8:31b

If God is for us, who can be against us?

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, a people for his own possession...

- **Believers in Christ** We are a great and holy nation! That has the Lord our God near to us whenever we call to him. Day/ night Good times / bad times.
- Not a millisecond goes by in which God is unavailable, on hold or resting that he doesn't hear us.
- He doesn't roll his eyes and oh no not you again. Look at Hebrews he says

Hebrews 10:19-23

Therefore, brothers, since we have **confidence** to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us **draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.**

James 4:8a

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

If you are struggling with praying to God, realize He is so near to us whenever we call upon him. It is his invitation to us.

Jesus helps us further understand this intimacy we have when he teaches the disciples to pray by starting out and saying "Our Father..."

The New Testament explicitly reserves the richness of the term "children of God" for those who have been adopted into the family of God by grace through faith in Jesus death and resurrection.

- I understand that for many this label of Father is difficult and unfortunately, it may trigger your actual struggle in praying to God.-And I want to be sensitive to that.
- But listen to be adopted mean that now you've been personally established God's fatherly. Which is better and higher and deeper even the best fathers or parents you may have.
- It is the most intimacy and unbreakable relationship possible with the God of the universe and He wants that intimacy with you to grow deeper.

- To be a child of God means that we have access to very throne room of heaven... and look at how its described...

Hebrews 4:15-16

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to **the throne of grace** that we may **receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**"

- When we need the drive to pray more we are in time of need. Go to him
- "When we need God's grace, He invites us to seek his face"
- "When in a time of need, Christ says Come to me."
- When we are the ones condemning ourselves God is actually inviting us to confidently come to Him and receive his mercy and grace. His throne is not a judgment seat, it's a mercy seat.

For some of you, that call maybe now for you to be rescued from the consequences of your failures and put your trust in the forgiveness offered to you from God through Jesus Christ's act on the Cross. Trusting Him to be the one who rescues you- because your good work won't. No matter how sincere or how many.. Trust in Jesus to save you believe and make that turn around.

So when prayer is a struggle remembering Who God is- not only in his holiness strength and power- but in his love and joyful demeanor, filled with grace- is to help us draw near with confidence boldness that while in His presence we will holdfast to the hope in God whole alone is faithful and true.

Over all "g"ods, pursuits and desires

When prayer is a struggle, the Bible reminds us,

2. What Prayer Is

If someone asked you "Say I know you're a Christian, what exactly is prayer?" How would you answer that question?

I fear that many of us would walk out today and say "Well he didn't give me any different techniques on how to get God to answer my prayers."

We must shift our thinking- majorly - from list and requests to conversations and encounters.

A. Prayer is both a conversation and an encounter with God. {write that}

- It is a personal response and address to a personal God who is inviting and near

B. Practical Defintion

I love how The Anglican Catechism "To Be A Christian" address prayer. Reminds us:
What is prayer?

154. **Prayer is turning my heart toward God, to listen and to speak with**

him. (Psalms 84; 123; Matthew 7:7–11; John 17:1–9)

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Psalms 84:1,2

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 7:7-11

Let's break down that definition of what Prayer is.

1. Prayer is turning my heart toward God.

A. We all understand the central desire of a Christian's life is that God would be glorified.

1) That everything we do it be for the Glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31.

B. The central activity of a Christian's life is to know and love God deeper than yesterday.

- To love Him with our whole Heart Soul Mind Strength. By that enjoyment and pursuit and subsequent lifestyle, God will be glorified. Prayer creates and stirs that love and enjoyment.

1) Taste and see that the Lord is good. Psalm 34:8

2) Prayer is an experience of God's presence one which we sense his goodness, power, mercy and love.

The Anglican Catechism also asks the question:

155. What should you seek in prayer?

In prayer, I should seek not only God's provision for my needs, but fellowship with God, who made me for fellowship with himself.

(Exodus 33:7–11; Psalms 27:4, 8; 42:1–2; John 14:18–23; 1 John 1:3)

C. In Prayer we are not only to seek God's provision, but his fellowship which we are created for enjoying.

1) God is not hiding and not hard to find.

2) Psalm 27:8: David says: "You have said "Seek my face" My heart says to you, "Your face Lord, do I seek"

D. Fellowship prayer can be hard because we are too easily pleased.

1). "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."- C.S. Lewis

E. To know God and be known by God is not merely sharing ideas, but sharing ourselves. That takes time

1) Example: In friendships (even in dating relationships), sharing common ideas is the starting point of common point of interest. They grow from there to a sharing of ourselves. J.I. Packer: Friends...open their hearts to each other by what they say and do.

2) Knowing God this way is a personal dealing as He opens up to you.

3) "Knowing God is an emotional relationship, as well as an intellectual and volitional one."-Packer. It could not be deep if it was only one dimensional (intellectual)

How do we know that fellowship with God is two way?

That brings us to the second part of that definition"

2. Prayer is to listen and to speak with him

A. Speaking to God

Very practically here, to speak with God includes 3 categorizes according to Tim Keller's excellent book simply called Prayer: Experiencing Awe and intimacy with God. {highly recommend this book}

There are three basic kinds of prayer to God.

1. UPWARD PRAYER of praise and thanks that focuses on God himself
2. INWARD PRAYER OF self examination and confession that bring a deeper sense of sin and in return a higher experience of grace and assurance of love
3. OUTWARD PRAYER of supplication and intercession that focuses on our needs and the needs of others in the world.

We ultimately, can speak to God about anything- sometimes it is just unloading our hearts and minds and through this, we encounter God.

But for some the struggle is..

The concept of listening in this fellowship we are to have with God. It can be confusing. It comes two-fold:

B. Listening

First : We are talking but is He really listening? And then secondly how do we listen

1. Let's talk about God's listening first:

- Example: Social media at least there is a check mark that shows a message has been read. Why can't God have that? This question or struggle can go back to lack of faith that God hears us or even cares.

We join the ranks of many godly people who feel that way:

- Psam13:1 How long O Lord will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?- King David
- Job felt that way. Habakkuk cried out that God was not hearing him.

But the dual authorship of the Bible—the fact that it wasn't just David that penned these word but also the Holy Spirit helps us to remember: God knows your frustration and actual gives us the words to pray and the example to follow when we feel this way.

I want to give you unwavering assurance that God hears you regardless of prayers that are answered or unanswered or an experience giving you goosebumps and a warm heart. He can do all of that. And Its wonderful! But the same way circumstances can be misinterpreted and feelings can deceive us, we need Truth to set before our eyes and eyes of our heart. The Truth is found in God's very word!!

The Father Hears Me, this I know. For God's Word tells me so.

a. Psalm 34:15-18

The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. 16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. 17 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. 18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

- 4 Great reminders to put at the beginning of our prayers. Remember His promises. Stating these in a personal manner in your prayer will increase your faith "Father I thank you that when I cry for help you hear me and are near."

b. Psalm 65:2 "O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come."

c. John 9:31 “We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He listens to him.”

e. Proverbs 15:29 “The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.”

f. Lamentations 3:55-56

I called on Your name, Yahweh, from the depths of the Pit. You hear my plea: Do not ignore my cry for relief. You come near when I call on You; You say: “Do not be afraid.”

- Note Jeremiah is in the valley the depths of the pit. But reminds **himself** by faith that He doesn’t ignore us, He draws near us. Notice the passage doesn’t speak of immediate deliverance? God draws near, and speaks assurance, “Don’t be afraid.”

g. Isaiah 65:24

“Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear.” (This is God speaking)

So there are 7 reminders one for each day - but if you download my notes on the website you will see a lot more for you to memorize and read. So Yes God really is listening!

2. Now let’s talk about *our* listening.

When we grasp that prayer is more than lists and requests and is better understood as a conversation and encounter - we must regularly listen to God through His written word.

God speaks to us and meets with us through His Word.

a. Keller: Christian Prayer is Fellowship with the personal God who befriends us through speech.

b. The Bible teaches us that God’s words are identical with his action

i. Genesis 1:3 Let there be light. As humans we need deeds to back up our words. For God speaking and acting are the same

ii. Psalm 29 the power of God’s voice shakes the desert and breaks the cedar.

iii. When God names someone his very word constitutes that person. Ex. Abraham “father of multitude” His word makes an aged man and wife biologically able have a child that forms a nation.

iv. God, by his very nature acts through speaking

c. When the Bible talks of God’s word, it is talking of God’s active presence in the world.

i. Its why we stand at the reading of the Word.

ii. Hebrews 4:12 says The word is living and active.

iii. To say that God's word goes out to do something is to say God does something.

iv. If God's words are his personal active presence, then to put your trust in God's word *is* to put your trust in God.

d. "Communication from God is therefore communion with God, when met with a response of trust from us."

e. To understand the Bible is *simply not* just to get information about God. But to actually hear him and Meet God himself.

f. Our prayer life will shift toward a great fellowship conversation the more we clearly grasp who God is as our Father and who he isn't as a sugar daddy.

Many of us academically go from reading into prayer list. But there is a middle ground that can help foster a deeper spiritually and encounter with God in prayer and that is through meditation

Psalms 1:1

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but **his delight** is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he **meditates day and night**.

- The subject of Meditating on God's word is – I feel a sermon in its self. But let just skim the subject because it does involve actively listen to the Spirit through the Word of God.

Meditating is not the same as studying the Word.

- Studying is about understanding Truth. . Meditating is to ask yourself questions about that truth
- Meditation means to use the mind intensely, not emptying the mind like mantra. But filling the minds with truth of God's word and applying it to oneself.
- Thoughtful Scriptural meditation involves
 - reading the Word,
 - thinking through what the reading said about God or myself
 - and flipping that thought into a praise in my prayer time or a possible request or confession depending how my thoughts landed that day.

So when prayer is a Struggle remember what prayer is truly all about. Prayer is both a conversation and an encounter with God that both fosters intimacy and creates increased trust and love for God. Still have your list, still have your requests, but move deeper than that. Be still and know the He is God. Encounter his words to you and turn your heart to Him and let him be your satisfaction and even your treasure.

Let's review

When prayer is a struggle, the Bible reminds us,

1. Who God is

2. What Prayer is

3. That Prayer Matters

In light of the previous point I will sum this up simply: Yes Prayer does matter. We see within all of Scripture

Seek the Lord, Pray to God. Pray for one another.

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”

James 5:13-18

- James in verse 13 is calling Christians to respond to all situation with prayer good or bad.

Too many people get hung up on the questions:

- If God know everything why do we have to ask?

or

- If God sovereign over everything then why pray at all?

If you notice- these questions are very much orientated around viewing prayer as only a means of getting and requesting. When prayer is deeper than that.

The answer is we pray Because we are commanded to. And going back to our opening verse. Where Moses is appealing to the Israelites to show that in obeying God's word is beneficial because they have a God like no other and that is near to them- the results of obedience can be trusted though at times maybe not understood.

Same with prayer

Prayer requires and creates both restful trust and confident hope in the process of communing with God.

We pray not for God's benefit, but our own.

Praying is verbal expression of our faith and what we trust. Its good for us to hear ourselves express that. Too many of us internalize our faith to the detriment of a health growing faith.

We do not and will not know everything and how it works- and that is humbling and it makes us dependent on God. through prayer.

We know that when God makes his plans, he plans for his people to pray. **God ordains prayer as a means to change history or to act.**

The Bible says there are things that happened because of prayer and there are things that don't happen because there is no prayer.

- 2 Chron 7:14 if my people will pray...I will forgive and heal there land
- Luke 11:9-10 we who seeks will finds
- James4:2 we don't have because we don't ask.

So when prayer is a struggle remember that prayer matters. We don't change the eternal plans of God, yet with in the eternal plans there are means and ends in which God makes things work. And it is by God grace that involves us. It is a blessing that God involves His people in his plans.

Never presume he needs us, Cause he doesn't.

But attribute the proper credit to God. That is called honoring him and glorifying him. Which as we keep growing in our fellowship and communion with God that sweet encounter in glorifying Him publically and privately. Is the soul satisfying prayer time that fills our life with greater meaning purpose and love for Christ.

Let's pray

Father majorly shift our perspective on prayer from ourselves, to you. That we would answer the door knock of communing with you. Shift our attention in prayer from talking more to listening more seeing your Word, ruminate in our hearts and mind. May we converse and encounter your presence in the coming weeks drawing us into life changing deeper devotion to love you and others to the ultimate glory of your name. in Jesus name-Amen.

Additional notes

: Statements of Faith that Biblical Lovers and Worshipers of the Lord proclaimed in their prayers

Psalm 66:16-19

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. 17 I cried to him with my mouth,

and high praise was on my tongue. 18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. 17 I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. 18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. 19 But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. 20 Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

1 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.

Mark 11:24-25

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. {a sign that He heard} And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

John 16:24

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive {a sign that he heard}, and your joy will be complete {a sign of deep fellowship- due to the emotional aspect fulfilled}.

Matthew 6:6

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. {a sign of deep fellowship}.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.{this is not only an invite but a promise}

Psalm 139:1-4

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.{a reassurance of deeper intimacy of knowledge that God knows us}

Matthew 7:7

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.{Sign that he heard and a promise that he will do something}

=2 Chronicles 7:14

“If My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.”

Psalm 4:3

But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Psalm 17:6

I call upon you, for you will answer me {faith declaring!}, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words.

Psalm 18:6 ESV

In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

Psalm 28:1-2, 6

To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. 2 Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.... Blessed be the Lord! For he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.

Psalm 54:2 ESV

O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth.

Psalm 61:5 ESV

For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.

Psalm 77:1 ESV

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me.

Psalm 84:8 ESV

O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! Selah but he hears the prayer of the righteous.

1 Peter 3:12 ESV

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

WHEN PRAYER IS A STRUGGLE

DEUTERONOMY 4:4-7

Prayer is... to listen and to speak with him

The Bible reminds us...

1. Who _____

2. What _____

Prayer is turning my heart toward God

3. That _____