

Sonship

Lesson 6

Sonship and Prayer

Prayer: Fellowship with God as the means for advancing the kingdom

I. Understanding prayer as ‘meeting with the Father’ to know Him, to fellowship with Him and be filled by His Spirit for doing His will

To believe the claims of Jesus – that he is the Messiah for the world; that he has utterly defeated sin and death and is ruling over the nations to accomplish his saving purposes in the earth; that God’s purpose is to unite all things under his headship; that as his followers we are both forgiven and freed from the bondage to sin that keeps mankind in captivity and a constant state of brokenness and injustice; and that we are delighted in and empowered by his Spirit to be his body, his hands and feet in this world (nothing less than the salt of the earth and the light of the world in our union with Him) to bring the righteousness, compassion and justice of his kingdom rule and reign to expression even now -- is all pretty stunning stuff.

How can we “mere mortals” actually be guided and led into lives that reflect this vision of God over us as his people? Where do we get the daily “wherewithal” to keep this in perspective despite our own sin; despite opposition; despite our own financial and emotional and relational fears, needs and brokenness? Even if we totally embrace this and accept it as our “calling,” where do we get the perspective and wisdom to follow through on this and have both the needed desire as well as the actual power to put this into practice?

This is what prayer is all about. This is the means God has appointed to existentially enable us to see this move from abstract principles we may consent to, to actually living this out in our daily lives.

A. What makes prayer so powerful?

Prayer is the means of conscious fellowship with God as our Father, who wants to bless us, through communion and fellowship with himself, the Son and the Spirit, to understand and fulfill the righteousness of the kingdom of God in this world.

1. This is the invitation of Jesus in John 14:11-14; 15:4, 7,8, 16; 16:23-24 and repeated by John in his letters

All these promises of God answering our prayers are in the context of recognizing the Father’s love, the love of the Son, the blessing of the Spirit and the doing of God’s will
[John 14:15-21; 15:9-12; 16:12-15]

2. This is the “discipleship” prayer Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount [*Mt 6:9-15; Luke 11:1-11*]
3. This is the kind of praying Paul models for us in his letters [*Col 1:9-14*], and is evident in the lives of the Old Testament people of God [*Dan 9:15-19*]

Wisdom from God, obedience in doing his will, strengthening of our hearts and minds to see and embrace his purposes, and delighting in God’s presence to accomplish all his good purposes all go hand in hand in prayer.

- B. Prayer is not powerful because it is the fulfillment of a religious duty. People often put faith in their prayers instead of faith in God - this is what Jesus warns against in being like the hypocrites or the pagans [*Matthew 6:5ff*]

The two extremes here are of religious boasting and religious insecurity.

- C. The Gospel gives us the freedom to pray to God as ‘Father’

You can and *are meant to* pray as a Son or Daughter of the King, knowing you are heard because the righteousness of Christ is both the source of your acceptance and the focus of your prayers.

1. You have been vindicated in the presence of God; declared righteous – not because you were not guilty -- but because your guilt has been atoned for by Christ.

As a side note, God as “Father” is not something new to the New Testament. The people of Israel were always known collectively as God’s “Firstborn Son” [*Ex 4:22, 23 cf 13:2, 12, cf. Jer 31:7-9; Hosea 1:10*]. The breadth of the term, the sense of intimacy comes to fullest expression in the New Testament, and the source of the confidence is the focus on Jesus the Messiah, and faith in Him.

2. You know you have the Spirit who calls out Abba, Father. If you have Christ, you have the Spirit and the promise of the kingdom [*Gal 4:4-7, Lk 11:11ff*]

II. This kind of praying is crucial in the ministry of Christ and in the life of the church

A. The Gospel of Luke reveals Jesus' prayer life (his fellowship with the Father) as one of the central driving forces for his ministry

- keeping focus with the demands of ministry [Luke 5:12-16]
- choosing the disciples/Sermon on the Mount [Luke 6:12 ff]
- gaining the great confession [Luke 9:18]
- The Transfiguration [Luke 9:28]
- teaching others to pray [Luke 11:1]
- effective, priestly prayer [Luke 22: 32]
- prayer before the Cross [Luke 22:41]

B. Paul's letters reveal that same central significance of prayer for his ministry

- needs prayer for faithfulness in opposition [Romans 15:30 ff]
- prayer as the source of meaningful deliverance [II Cor 1:8-11]
- prayer for the Spirit to communicate the greatness of God's salvation; prayer for the presence of Christ to increase; prayer for effective warfare [Ephesians 1:15 ff, 3:14 ff., 6:18-20]

C. Our own lives reveal the deep need for such prayer/fellowship with God as the means for seeing the kingdom advance in ourselves and others. We are confronting the darkness in our own sin nature, the broken world, and over against the opposition of Satan.

When Jesus says you cannot bear fruit without abiding (dwelling) in him, it is an absolute truth! [John 15:5ff]

III. A few key perspectives to keep in mind for your prayer life

A. God loves you and is full of grace for you in Christ and wants to meet with you each day

1. This was the significance of the morning and evening sacrifices in Israel; Daniel's praying three times a day and David calling out to God in the Psalms early in the morning, all day long and even through the night
2. You are not an orphan casting feathers in the wind, but are meant to be confident of God's Fatherly presence and power [John 14:15-21; Romans 8:15-17]

The more you get this settled -- that you have the “right,” the “standing before God, granted by Him, to come into His presence -- the more effective your praying will be because you will have the freedom to believe God more

- B. You can come with all kinds of prayers and all kinds of issues, but come [*Jeremiah 20:7ff; Psalm 22; Eph 3:14-21*]

Begin each day by asking for the Spirit, freely, and then move on in your prayer life: at times your sense of the Spirit's presence will be experiential and strong, at times you may not 'feel' a whole lot; but in either case, be assured, if you ask for the Spirit, the Father will give Him to you [*John 14:23*]

- C. As you seek to do God's will -- to pursue justice and mercy and humility with all people in all circumstances of life -- you may feel like you are naive, foolish, easily led astray; but, as you learn to come to your Father in prayer you will learn more and more that you can trust God to lead you into paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He wants to give you wisdom; and you need to ask for it.

Phil 1:9-11; James 1:2-8

Through the fellowship of prayer with God you can give up self-glorifying and let God lead you into relationship with Himself and others - even through suffering, when needed.

- D. You are in partnership with God

1. He has the resources for all you need for today, tomorrow and beyond [*Phil 4:14-19*]

Your task is to show up, believe and obey through the Spirit's power

2. You do not have to approach God's will as an alien -- strictly from the viewpoint of your wounds -- but from the confidence of his grace sustaining you. These are “big” prayers Paul prays for us -- and that Jesus prays for us -- [*Jn 17*]. Can you pray those big prayers for yourself and others?
- a. Determine if your ambitions and desires are the Lord's -- are they about justice, mercy and love? Are they about doing God's revealed will -- loving your spouse, children, neighbor, the widow, the oppressed, the immigrant, your enemies? Then, pray expectantly for the blessing of God [*John 15:5*]
- b. Repent of anxiety and worry, which hinder our fellowship with God throughout the day. Anxiety reveals self-centeredness.

- It makes plain that the kingdom of self is raging and reigning. It reveals we have ambitions, desires, dreams, demands, expectations and more that we are keeping to ourselves for our self
 - It shows a decided lack of faith in God's ability to provide
 - It is focused on self instead of God
- E. Remember that prayer mirrors the Gospel and God has determined to display his glory and presence through the means that do mirror -- and therefore reinforce -- the Gospel

In prayer we come to God at our point of need. We recognize God alone is the central actor who can fulfill his purposes. The results are always a gift.