

Prayer-03

by William MacDonald

To have an effective prayer life, we must pray according to God's will, be sincere, persevere, and trust in His loving guidance.

Duration: 43:53

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 9:37, Matthew 10:1, Matthew 20:32, Romans 8:28, Hebrews 10:22

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a story about a missionary who had to travel to a distant city to collect money for a hospital. On their way back through a dangerous area, the missionary and his helper were concerned about being robbed. However, they decided to trust in God's protection and camped out with the money. Miraculously, they woke up the next morning to find everything intact. Weeks later, a bandit chief who had received treatment at the hospital recognized the missionary and asked if they had camped on a hill with soldiers guarding them. The missionary revealed that they had no soldiers, but God had protected them. The preacher uses this story to emphasize the importance of trusting in God's plan and how He works all things together for good for those who love Him, as stated in Romans 8:28.

Transcript

The Bible to 1 John, chapter 5, please, and verses 14 and 15. 1 John, chapter 5, verses 14 and 15. This is the confidence that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.

If we know that He heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petition that we desired of Him. Last Sunday morning, we were speaking on the subject of prayer, one of the mightiest forces in the universe, a force that we don't avail ourselves of as much as we should. Every day, there are marvelous miracles going on in the realm of prayer.

It would be interesting to hear how many direct answers to prayer those of us in the room today had during the last week, but they're going on all the time. A missionary in a foreign land had gone to a distant city to get money to run the hospital, and they were returning through a trackless wild with this money, and the trip had taken them longer than they expected, and they were really going to ban this country. The missionary said to his national helper, he said, we're going to have to spend the night here.

The national helper said, we can't do that. We're in enemy territory. We're in bandit territory.

They'll come and take all of our money. He said, we have to. He said the money is for God's work, and he said, we'll just ask the Lord to protect us.

So they pitched their camp that night, and they slept out there with the money, and they woke up in the morning, and everything was intact. Some weeks later, a bandit chief came to the hospital for treatment, and he recognized the missionary, and while he was getting treatment, he said, did you go to a certain city to get money and bring it back to the hospital? Yes, we did. He said, did you camp on the little hill with 27 soldiers guarding you? Well, he said, we camped on the little hill, but we had no soldiers.

He's just a national helper and myself. He said, oh, but you did. He said, we tried to attack you that night, but he said there were 27 soldiers guarding you.

Well, the missionary knew that there weren't, didn't he? He thought he did. Sometime later, that story was told in the homeland, and one of the Christians remembered that they had prayed that night, and there were 27 people at the prayer meeting. They looked up the diary of the attendance, and there were 27 people at the prayer meeting.

Last week, we mentioned that prayer invades the realm of the invisible, and God has his hosts, as we saw last week, surrounding the city, and as the man of God prayed, open the young man's eyes that he may see. I believe God would open our eyes to show us that in prayer, there's power with God and with men. Now, last week, we saw that if we were going to have an effective prayer life, we have to be believers in the Lord Jesus.

Not that God doesn't sometimes answer the prayers of unbelievers. He does, but you can't count on it. But, if you're a believer, you can count on it.

You can count on an effective prayer life. We saw, secondly, that there must be no unconfessed sin in our lives. We've got to be clean to have audience in the throne room.

And we saw, thirdly, that our prayers must be in faith. We must believe that God is able, that God is willing, that he's a rewarder of those who diligently teach him. Now, the next point we want to make this morning is that our prayers must be according to the will of God.

Now, that's what we read in this passage in 1 John, chapter 5, verses 14 and 15. Our prayers must be in accordance with the will of God. You should say, how do I know his will? Well, we have a general outline of the will of God in the Bible, don't we? The best way I can know what is in accordance with the will of God is to speak myself in the word of God, because the Bible gives us a general outline of his will.

Now, in addition to that, God is able to impart a knowledge of his will to us in a subjective way. You've got to be very careful here, because you hear a lot of Christians going around saying that such and such is the will of God, when we know it's not the will of God. The Bible says it's not the will of God.

And yet, God is able to impart to us divine information as to what his will in a particular situation might be, and we test that against the word of God. That's how we can be sure. We know, for instance, it's not always God's will to heal, and yet I believe in some particular cases he can impart to us the knowledge that he is going to heal, that he will heal, and we can pray with assurance that he will do it.

Next, our prayers must be sincere. Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 22, our prayers must be sincere. God isn't playing games with people, and he doesn't want us to play games with him either, and I'll give some

illustrations of that.

Hebrews 10, 22. I'll go back to verse 19. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh, and having a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart.

That word true there means sincere. With a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. So, when I pray, I want to be sincere with God in prayer.

How? Well, first of all, I make it a rule not to ask God to do something I can do myself. A young unemployed fellow wrote to me this last week, and he said, jobs are from the Lord. I said, yes, jobs? I wrote back, yes, jobs are from the Lord, but usually I have to go out and look for them.

And there's a mysterious combination of the divine and the human. God gave me a healthy body, he gave me two legs, and God ordinarily isn't going to drop a job into my lap. Isn't that right? And for me just to sit unemployed, and sit coaxed all day, and expect a job to come to me, obviously that's being sincere with God.

Any more than I would stand on a railroad track with an oncoming stretch, and ask God to deliver me from the train. Probably won't do it. Why? Because he gave me two legs to answer that prayer.

That's why. God wants us to have true heart. He wants us to have sincere heart, and genuine heart in our dealing.

Also, sincerity in prayer. If I pray for something, I must be willing for God to use me in answering that prayer. Let me give you an illustration of that.

Matthew chapter 9, Matthew chapter 9, the end of the chapter, verse 37. Matthew 9, 37. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few.

Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Did you get the connection? He says to the disciples, you pray that the Lord will send forth laborers, and he called them.

If I pray that God is going to send people forth to the mission field, I've got to be willing to go. I'm not being sincere if I say, send somebody else's children to the mission field, and I'm not willing for them to send my, for him to send my children. That's not sincerity in prayer.

What it's saying is that it's okay for someone else's kids to go to the mission field, but my children are above that. Harold Harper, we were speaking about Harold Harper this morning, some of his friends, he was in a home once, and the girl was there, a young girl, and he said, well, what are you planning to do? Well, I plan to become a nurse. Well, he said, I hope you keep the work of the Lord in mind.

The mission field, tremendous need for nurses in the mission field. The mother said, don't talk like that to my daughter. That isn't what I had planned for her.

Well, you can't pray in sincerity under such circumstances. It would be ridiculous for that mother to ask the Lord to send workers into the harvest field. Who's she kidding? God doesn't work under those

circumstances, and God knows our hearts when we pray, and he knows when we're sincere, and he knows when our heart is a true heart.

So, I must be willing for God to use me to answer the prayers that I offer to him. Another way we can be insincere in prayer is by preaching at people in our prayers. You know, somebody's sitting there, and maybe you'll leave a few jabs in your prayer for someone who might be listening.

That's insincerity in prayer. When we pray, we speak to God, through the Lord Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and God desires truth in the inward part. Now, don't misunderstand me.

I do believe our prayers have an edifying influence on others. I do believe that. For instance, young people learn to pray when they pray with others.

Isn't that right? That's okay. But, I think it's wrong to preach at others in our prayers, or just to pray for effect. It was once reported of Joseph Parker that he had prayed, that Sunday he had prayed the most eloquent prayer that had ever been prayed to a Boston audience.

Well, we don't pray to Boston audiences. We pray to the Lord, not to be heard of then, but to be heard where it really counts. Next, we must learn to persevere in prayer.

And I have to admit that when I come to this point, there's a great deal of mystery to it. We must learn to persevere in prayer. You read about this in Luke.

Maybe we should just turn to one of these passages in Luke, Luke chapter 11, verses 5 through 10. Luke chapter 11, verses 5 through 10. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.

And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not, the door is now shut, my children are with me in bed, I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you.

Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth.

He that seeketh, findeth. To him that knocketh, and it shall be opened. There are prayers that we must persevere in.

I confess to you there are sometimes I pray for a thing, I pray for it once, I never pray for it again. Sometimes. But there are other circumstances in life where the prayer extends over many years.

During the Second World War, I was with a pilot in the Navy. I've prayed for him ever since, 1945. Some of you weren't born then.

And the Lord won't let the burden lift. Even if I stop communicating with him and his family, something will happen to bring them back into my life again. Why is that? The Lord keeps the burden for them.

What does it mean? It's easy to understand. What else? Right in our own family, I had a brother, he wouldn't mind my telling this, that's why I tell it, I had a brother who was away from the Lord for 30 years. 30 years.

We prayed, and sometimes you're wondering, God ever going to answer this prayer? Yes. The loved one, you don't dare stop. My father died in 1968, and his dying prayer was that the Lord would bring back the prodigal to himself.

Two years ago, last October, I got a letter from my stepmother saying a tragedy had come into my brother's home. And I got down on my knees and said, Lord, use this to break him. Two weeks later, I got a letter from my stepmother.

She said, your brother is a broken man. She used the word. She didn't know what I had prayed.

She said, your brother is a broken man. One morning, I was down on my knees praying before going off to classes. And the Spirit of God gave me a prayer.

I hadn't even planned it. I prayed, Lord, reveal yourself to me today. I know you're there.

I know you're alive. I know you're powerful, but reveal yourself to me today in some way. When the mail came, it was a case for my brother.

Before I opened it, before I listened to what I knew what it was, it was 90 minutes of unrelieved sobbing, saying he had come back to the Lord. I'll tell you, 30 years of prayer. That may be an encouragement to some of you in the meeting this morning.

Maybe some with unsaved love would be with me. God, everybody answered. Pray on.

Persevere in prayer. Maybe some of you with loved ones who are cold and hardened, following Jesus at a distance. I say, pray on.

We prayed for 30 years. I said, it's a joy to fellowship with my brother today, walking with the Lord, on fire for the Lord, and enthusiastic about the Savior. Took an awful tragedy to do it.

I won't go into details. We have to persevere in prayer when we're waiting for the guidance of the Lord. Mind you, it would be nice if you could just get down on your knees and pray for guidance, and the guidance is there, but it doesn't happen that way.

I asked the Lord, show me a certain thing. And on and on and on, and no answer. I remember, I remember back in 1946, I was praying, crying, praying, desperate to know the will of God for the years ahead.

And one morning, I thought, you know, there's going to be no answer. This is unbelief. And that morning, in my morning reading, I was in Habakkuk chapter 2. It said, the vision is yet for an appointed time.

It will surely come, and will not tarry, only wait for it. And I said, thank you, Lord, I'll wait. And I waited 12 more months, and it came, and it was as bright as the sun.

I couldn't miss it. If I had failed to obey, I would have been disobedient. 18 months? Well, wasn't that gracious of the Lord to drop that little handful along the way, just to keep me praying? And so, this scripture says, ask, and keep on asking.

Seek, and keep on seeking. Knock, and keep on knocking. The man over at the Fairhaven assembly just has a few more days to live, dying of cancer.

His old mother died years ago, praying for him. He only got saved within the last few weeks. He wanted to be baptized, but he was so sick, they couldn't immerse him under water.

They just took him into the bathtub, and poured water over his head, and he wept with joy. The other day, they went to him with the bread and the wine, and for the first and probably the only time in his life, he remembered the Savior in his passion and death. Mother prayed, she went on into heaven, never heard the answer.

She never knew the answer. I think she knows it today, don't you? And she'll be there soon. George Mueller tells that story, doesn't he, of praying, I think, for two men for so many years.

Sometimes you see your answers in life. Sometimes you see them after you pass off the scene. Next thing I think about prayer is, when I pray for something, I must be willing to be refused, if that's better for me.

I must be willing to be refused. God will never give me anything that's going to be harmful for me, or detrimental. Luke chapter 11, verses 11 through 13, right where we were before.

Luke 11, 11 through 13, "...if a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? If he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" God isn't going to deceive us when we pray, and he isn't going to harm us when we pray. He's a loving, heavenly Father. That would be a mean trick for a father.

His son asks him for bread and gives him a stone. What's the connection? Well, just remember that the bread in the Middle East wasn't wonder bread, you know, rising into a big loaf. It was that flat pocket bread.

Peacock bread, as you call it. You can buy it in states right now, or some of the stores. And, you know, it just bakes over an open hearth, and it sometimes has the coloring of a stone.

Doesn't look unlike a flat stone. And so, the son asks his father for bread and gives him a stone. God isn't like that.

Or, he asks him for a fish, and he gets a serpent. Or, he asks for an egg, and he gives him a scorpion. No, no.

Any loving, earthly father wouldn't do that. How much less would your heavenly Father do it? So, when I come to the Lord in prayer, I have to be willing to be refused. And, I oftentimes have asked the Lord for things that really wouldn't have been good for me.

I thought they were. They weren't exactly needs. They were desires.

God loves me too much to let me come. And, on the other hand, when I pray, I must be willing that God should give me something better than I ask for. He does this often.

I must be willing that God should give me something better than I ask for. Romans chapter 8, verses 26 through 28. Romans 8, 26 through 28.

Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. For the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that

searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And, we know that all things work together for good. So, to those that love God, who are the call according to his purpose, he must be willing to accept something better than he asks for. Let me give you an illustration.

In 1939, my mother was taken to the hospital, and there was an unfortunate accident in the hospital with an instrument, and she developed infection. And she lingered in the hospital for six months, and suffered terribly. It was a Presbyterian minister who went to visit her one day, and she was in such suffering that he had to leave the room.

She couldn't stand it. She wasn't suffering, she was. And we cried, my father, my brother, and I cried to the Lord, but the Lord was there.

He did. She ended six months, she was very low, and one night some of the brothers came in from the assembly after the Sunday evening meeting, and one of them said, you know the time comes when we should stop asking the Lord for our will, and ask that his will be done. So, this was a new thought.

We had been asking the Lord for our will for six months. We got it. She suffered terribly.

So, we got down that night on our knees while the folks from the assembly were still there. My father prayed, thy will be done. It was a hard prayer.

And I prayed, Lord, thy will be done. And my brother was praying, and the phone rang. They said, this is the hospital.

If you want to see Mrs. McDonald, you've got to hurry. She's slipping into a coma. She did.

She'd been into a coma and never came out of it. She was gone in a few days. The Lord showed me, he gave us something better than we asked for.

I want to tell you, it's better to have a mother in heaven enjoying the glories of Christ than suffering in Massachusetts General Hospital untold suffering. It really is. You've got to be willing to let go.

God knows what death, and here's the Holy Spirit praying for us, and God knows what the Holy Spirit is praying according to the will of God. And I think if you should examine your own life, you'd find that so often God has given you something better than you asked for. Isn't that like him? It really is.

The next point I want to make is that the best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity. The best prayer in life comes from a strong inward necessity. Turn back to Psalm 61 and verse 2. I'll always love this Psalm.

Psalm 61 and verse 2, and I tell you, whatever else you want to say about David, he knew how to pray. He never had a New Testament or an Old Testament either. Hear my cry, O God.

You can hear the words coming dipping hot out of his soul. Hear my cry, O God. Attend unto my prayer from the end of the earth.

Will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed? Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Boy, I want to tell you, when you get to the end of the earth and your heart is overwhelmed, you realize the rock's got to be higher than you are if it's going to be any help. They is the help of man, and when you're in that tight spot, there's only one way to look, and that way is up. The best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity.

What it means is that the more we're cast upon the Lord, the better we can pray. You pray better when you're sick or when you're well, when you're sick. And you wonder sometimes why we do ourselves a great disfavor of trying to protect ourselves from every conceivable form of loss and discomfort.

Some of us spend our lives just cushioning ourselves against every shock, and our prayers are lifeless. I'd like to tell you a little story. I may have told this before here in community, but there are some here who didn't hear it.

Some years ago, a young fellow came from overseas. He had been serving the Lord overseas. He visited me in my little apartment in Oak Park.

He was really sold out to Jesus, this fellow. He had his graduate degree from Wheaton College, and really a very capable, gifted fellow, but he had gone overseas to serve the Lord. Now he was coming back.

He came to share a problem with me that had arisen overseas. So before he left me, I thought I just, as they say, ticked his brains a little. And I said, Greg, what makes you tick anyway? I said, here you are, your graduate degree from Wheaton, and you could have the world eating out of your hand, and you go overseas, and you throw your life away with a bunch of nobodies over there.

Because he knew what I was doing. So he said, Bill, he said, I see that it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. He said, you have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God, where if God fails you, you're sunk.

And he said, if you do that, there'll be a power in your life, and when you touch other lives, something will happen for God. I like that. Let me say it again, because it's so good.

He said, Bill, I see it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. You have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God, where if God fails you, you're sunk. And if you do that, there'll be a power in your life, and when you touch other lives, something will happen for God.

So that told me what I wanted to know. I said, all right, Greg, you're going to another city here in the Midwest, and there's an elder in an assembly in that city. He ought to know what you told me about this problem today.

I said, I want you to go to this guy. I gave him the name and address. He said, you go and tell him.

So a little while later, I got a letter from Greg from Los Angeles, and he said, you know, Bill, he said, I went to that city, and he said, the Lord knows I was open. I was willing to go to that elder, but he said, I engaged in appointments, meetings, and as the time went on, I didn't see him. But he said, the Lord knows that even now I'm open to this meeting.

So he had two weeks of meetings down in Los Angeles, and then he got on a Greyhound bus to travel back to the East Coast to go overseas, and when he got on the bus, the seats were fairly empty. I mean,

there weren't many people on the bus, but they drove over to Riverside, and when they got to Riverside, the bus started to fill up, and he noticed that every seat was taken but the seat next to him. So he bowed his head, and he said, Lord Jesus, lead on some little, some young person that I can speak to about you, and he opened up his eyes and looked, and it was an older man getting on, and the older man came and sat right beside him, and he said, young or old, Lord, I have my duty to do, and he turned to the man, and he started to whisper to him about, oh, our Jesus.

The man said, well, it's a funny thing you should speak to me about Jesus. He said, I happen to be a born again Christian. He said, you are? He said, my name is Greg Livingston, and the man said, my name is, and gave him the name of the elder from that Midwest descent, Riverside, California, from Wisconsin, Riverside, California.

Now, how did he get there? Well, I'll tell you how. That man and his wife have a daughter living in Phoenix, Arizona, married, and they decided to take a trip out to visit her, and they took a drive-away car, and the drive-away car had to be delivered at Riverside. So, he dropped his wife off in Phoenix, and drove on to Riverside, and left the car there, and got on a Greyhound bus to travel back to Phoenix, and sat beside Greg Livingston.

Pretty remarkable when you think of all the cities in the United States where Greyhound buses stop. Think of all the Greyhound buses there are, all the hours in the day, all the seats on a bus. Quite a coincidence, isn't it, that God should put that elder sitting beside Greg Livingston.

Why didn't he do that? Listen, it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. You have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God, for if God fails you, you're sunk, and if you do that, there'll be a power in your life, and when you touch other lives, something will happen for God. I met that elder three months later, and he said to me, Joe, in all my life, he said, I don't think anything ever spoke to me so loudly as that, that God was interested in us, enough to put us together next to each other on a Greyhound bus.

He said, we had three hours of the most, whatever hours, hours of the most remarkable fellowship from Riverside. It's really wonderful. The best prayer comes from a strong, inward necessity, and when we're in the place where we're really cast upon the Lord, that's where we can pray best and see the most remarkable answers to occur.

Next, our prayers should be specific. Our prayers should be specific. We should come to the Lord and tell him as specifically as a child would tell his earthly father.

I have a good illustration of this in Matthew chapter 20 and verse 32. Matthew 20 and verse 32, and Jesus is coming to Jericho, or departing actually from Jericho, and there are a couple of blind men there. It says in verse 32, and Jesus stood still and called them and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They said unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

So Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him. Specific. You know, if we had been those blind men and Jesus said, What will you that I should do to you? We would have probably said, Oh, Lord, bless me in a general sort of way.

Right? But they said, Lord, we want to see. And he said, That's fine. I'm sure if you ask the Lord to bless missionaries throughout the world, you'll bless them, but you'll never know it.

But if you ask God to guide Bill and Ellis Bees as they land in Africa and have to go through Idi Amin's territory in order to get to Zaire, one of these days you may get quite a fascinating letter from Bill and Ellis Bees telling of the marvelous way God undertook for them in going through that man's country. The poet said, If you'd been living when Christ was on earth and had met the Savior kind, what would you've asked him to do for you, supposing you were blind? The child considered and then replied, I suppose that without doubt I'd have asked the Lord for a dog with a chain to lead me daily about. How often thus in our faithless prayers we acknowledge with shame or pride we've only asked for a dog with a chain when we might have had opened eyes.

Those men didn't want a seeing-eye dog. They wanted seeing eyes and a gut, what they asked for. Just in closing, there are two times in life when we ought to pray.

Two times. When we feel like it and when we don't feel like it. Or sometimes we don't exactly feel like praying, isn't that right? A good time to pray.

Pray that the Lord will get us close to himself. I believe we should pray at specific times, we should develop prayer habits, and I believe we should live in the atmosphere of prayer, too. Like Nehemiah, he lived in the atmosphere of prayer.

One day he was sad before the king with a capital offense to be sad before the king. That was punishable by death, because it might have indicated a plot against the king's life. And the king said, then why are you sad? And he said, so I pray to the God of heaven.

Before he even answered the king, he spoke to the king. He spoke to the real king before he answered the earthly king. But that's what we ought to do.

We ought to live in the atmosphere of prayer. Going through life, walking down the street, driving the car, paying attention to the traffic rules, but speaking to the Lord, too, along the way. Next week we'll continue our little study of prayer, and our great desire is that as a result of this emphasis on prayer, that our own lives will be touched, that we will learn to do business with God in great water, and that those of us here today will be seeing spectacular answers to prayer because we ask in the name of Jesus.

Shall we pray? Father, we just marvel today when we think of the tremendous privilege that is ours of speaking to you at any time of the day or night. We don't have to make an appointment like we do with the doctor or the lawyer. We have access to you.

We don't have it with the president or a lot of other people in the world, but we have access to you. Father, we can come and bring great petitions with us because your love and power are such we can never ask too much. Shall we do pray once again with the disciples? Lord, teach us to pray.

Help us, Lord, to rise above flesh and blood, and as Greg said, help us to have lives so that when we touch others, there will be a power in our lives, and things will happen for God. We ask it in the Savior's name. Amen.

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