

Prayerful Life, Joyful Life

John 16:17-24

Bryn MacPhail / Apr. 3, 2011

Every Christian knows that we are supposed to pray, but I'm not sure that every Christian understands the *purpose* behind and the *benefits* of prayer.

As a result many Christians fall into one of two traps: either we *neglect* prayer because we don't understand it, or, we *misuse* prayer because we don't know what we should be praying for.

I have met lots of people who believe that the primary purpose of prayer is to get us out of trouble when we find ourselves in a desperate situation. For such individuals, prayer is what we do when we have nowhere else to turn.

But prayer is so much more than this. I submit to you this morning that *prayer is the primary way in which we communicate with God.*

One might want to say that reading the Scripture is the primary way in which we communicate with God, and yet, to effectively understand and apply the Scripture to our lives it is necessary that we read it prayerfully.

In our text this morning, we see another heartening aspect of prayer. Not only is prayer the primary way in which we *communicate* with God, but *prayer is also the primary way in which we enjoy God.*

We could talk at length about why we *ought* to pray, but here we are being given a compelling reason for why would *want* to pray.

When we pray rightly, what we gain is joy-producing fellowship with the God who created this Universe.

Would you agree that this is not a common perspective of prayer? Would you agree that, for many Christians, prayer is more focussed on what we can *get* from God?

By way of illustration, I'd like to demonstrate why using prayer to get things from God misses the mark.

Imagine yourself buying 2 tickets for a sporting event or for a theatre production. You then give one of those tickets to a friend because you want to spend more time with him/her.

How would you feel if your friend then turned around and sold that ticket to a stranger in order to gain money to spend on something else?

This, unfortunately, is what we often do with the gift of prayer. God has given us prayer in order that we may learn the joy of having fellowship with *Him*. But instead we have grown accustomed to using prayer to get things from God.

Prayer was never intended to be a means of gaining things to delight in apart from God. *The intention of prayer is to enable us to delight in God.*

This coming Tuesday evening, we will be looking at John, chapter 14, and examining what it means to *pray in Jesus' name*. While I don't want to preach that sermon here, I do want to point out the connection between John 14 and John 16.

In John 14:13, Jesus essentially says that when you ask for things “**in My name**” it brings glory to our Heavenly Father.

In John 16:24, Jesus essentially says that when you ask for things “**in My name**” it completes our joy.

Why we *ought* to pray, and why we would *want* to pray, emerges from these texts. *When we pray according to Jesus' design, God gets glory, and we get joy.*

What a blessed equation, that God's concern for His own glory is not at odds with His concern for us.

When God answers our prayers He does so to glorify Himself and to complete our joy.

Some of you might be familiar with the Westminster Catechism of the reformed tradition. If you are, you probably have memorized the first question and answer:

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

In light of John 14:13 and John 16:24, the application could not be more clear—*in order to glorify God and to enjoy Him, we must commit ourselves to a life of prayer.*

God is glorified when we treat Him as the inexhaustible reservoir of hope and help.

I love the way Pastor John Piper puts it: “God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in Him”.

God is glorified when we enjoy Him, and prayer is the key to unlocking Christian joy.

At this point, it is necessary for me to address what is obvious to probably each of us—*God does not always give us what we ask for.*

How are we to reconcile our experience of unanswered prayer and Jesus' promise to do "**whatever (we) ask**"? (Jn. 14:13; 16:24).

The apostle James reminds us that there is a type of prayer that dishonours God. If a primary purpose of prayer is to glorify God, it follows that God will not answer prayers that do not aim at His honour.

If our prayers are self-centred rather than God-centred, James warns us not to expect answered prayer (Jas. 4:3, 4).

There are other times, I suspect, that our prayers are not answered because they are not in our best interests or in the best interests of others. Quite often, in our short-sightedness, we ask for things that would actually be detrimental to us. In such cases, God in His grace does not answer our prayers.

There remains, however, those unanswered prayers that, from a human perspective, seem noble and consistent with the nature of our loving Lord. Why they remain unanswered, I do not know.

What I will say is this: *our vision is limited*. Our perspective, relative to God's, is massively confined.

God does answer prayer. Not always in ways we would expect, and not always as quickly as we would hope for, but He does answer prayer.

And when God answers prayer, He gets the glory He deserves and we get the joy that we desperately long for.

I think that I have been here long enough for you to know that I'm not in the habit of proving a point by way of personal example.

God's Word does not need my experience to confirm its truth.

But doesn't it help, doesn't it strengthen our faith in God, when we experience what His Word promises?

I want to share with you how profoundly the principles of John 14:13 and John 16:24 have come alive for me and for my family.

I want to share the story of how I was called to be your minister...

Ridley College / Sean Donahue

John Donahue's funeral in Dec. 2006 / Meeting Scott Kirkland

Pulpit supply 2007 / Lucaya Kirk's elders encourage me to apply

Pulpit supply 2009 / More encouragement to apply

Early in process, I did not have a strong inclination to leave SGK or a strong inclination to come to Nassau, but I began praying, 'Lord, I want to be where You want me.'

I was interviewed in late January of 2010 and attended worship on Sunday and there was only 35-40 in attendance. I had been made aware of the recent history of turmoil, controversy, and unrest. I had heard of some of the dysfunctional ministries within the last decade.

I could feel a part of me being totally unnerved by what I might be getting into, but I continued to pray, 'Lord, I want to be where You want me.'

We know how the story ends, but there is a danger of concluding that we are together now in ministry simply because of a series of human processes and a couple of coincidental personal connections.

I reject that notion outright. I realize that we have only been together for 9 months, but every indication is that *what we are currently enjoying is a direct result of prayer.*

Some of you, perhaps many of you, prayed for a pastor of the Lord's choosing. And, concurrently, the MacPhail's prayed for the Lord to place us according to His will.

What I want us to see is that when we prayed for the Lord's will to be done, He answered!

And in answering our prayer, He did what? He brought glory to Himself and filled our hearts with joy!

What Jesus promised in this passage, we are experiencing!

I want to leave you with a passage of Scripture from Isaiah 58. The context of the passage is the Lord explaining why He is not listening to the prayers of Israel, and why He is not responding to their fasts.

The Lord explains that the people's hypocrisy is preventing their prayers from being heard. He says through Isaiah, "**Is this the kind of**

fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself?” (Isa. 58:5).

The people of Israel were being diligent on the Sabbath, but apparently the rest of the week they did whatever they wanted. As a result, the Lord wanted them to know He was no longer listening to their prayers.

Thankfully, a bit further on in the passage, the Lord reveals His eagerness to answer prayer. Here is what He says:

6 “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

9 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”

Friends, I leave you with this text—I share my story with you—because I want you to know without a shadow of doubt that the Lord is eager to answer prayer.

Pray for the will of the Lord to be done in your own life, and our Heavenly Father will answer. And in answering He will glorify Himself and He will complete our joy. Amen.