

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

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Scripture: Various

***"How's Your Prayer Life? (part 1)"***

**ONE OF GOD'S GREATEST GIFTS**

I want to begin with a question, today. "How's your prayer life?" I could ask you, "How's your love life?" Or "How's your work?" Or "How's your family?" Those are important personal questions that would have meaning for you. But what is the most important question for the believer? "How's your prayer life?" You see, it's your prayer life that will determine everything else in life? Did you know that?

One of God's greatest gifts to us is the capacity to pray. Anyone and everyone can do it. God designed life for prayer. As Christians, we understand the importance of what it means to have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, prayer is the lifeblood in that relationship. It's like the oil in an engine – just like the oil in an engine keeps it running strong, so too prayer will keep our relationship with the Lord strong. We will see why in a moment.

Of course, when one speaks of prayer, **we need to recognize what it is not:** Prayer is not simply talking to God. It is not a one-sided conversation. Prayer is not simply asking God for things. That is part of it, but not the primary purpose of prayer. Prayer does not change God's will. Rather, we will see prayer is how God changes our will to conform to His. Sometimes people believe there are certain things too big or too small to pray about and that God does not want to be bothered by us or that some things should be left alone to God. That is false! The truth is - prayers do make a difference and can influence people and events. And finally, some people believe that it is not so much prayer that is important; rather it is the action that follows prayer that is most important. Again, such thinking is false! Right action must be preceded by right prayer.

Now if we are going to understand truly what prayer is and why it is so important, we need to look at what the Word of God says concerning it. And specifically at what the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ said and did concerning prayer.

**THE PRAYER SURVEY**

You may recall a few months ago that we asked everyone to do a prayer survey. And the majority of the respondents rated their prayer life as average or needing help. The type of prayer people were most comfortable with was informal prayer. Most of those who took the survey agreed that worship is the highest form of prayer. Most believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today, though a third said they were unsure and about 10% said no. The overwhelming majority believe notable miracles can occur when the Body of Christ prays and that our prayer room is an asset to the church. Those that didn't probably said "no" due to the fact that it is on the second floor! There was great interest in the possibility of having a seminar on prayer if it

were to help your prayer life grow. Concerning attending a prayer vigil, it was evenly divided with about 10% more on the positive side (60-40). **Bottom line, we recognize prayer is important but we also know that there is room for improvement for our church family both individually and corporately.**

**So how's your prayer life?** Yes, there is always room for improvement when it comes to prayer. And when we speak of prayer, there are four main aspects to it. When we understand these four, we are on the road to having a thriving prayer life. **What are the four? 1) the purpose of prayer 2) the plan of prayer 3) the practice of prayer and 4) the power of prayer.**

### **THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER**

If you want to know the purpose of prayer, you need to know what it is. So what is prayer? **It is communion with God** – it is being in an ongoing communicating relationship with the Living God. It involves intimate personal communication with the One who made you and loves you. It involves both sending our thoughts and words to Him and God doing the same to us. God does speak to us – that is why I addressed the question of *"How do we hear the voice of God?"* - in a three-part sermon series in February. So if I am going to be in communion with God **I need to be about listening as much as speaking.** In fact, I would argue we need to be in the habit of listening to God more than we need to speak to Him. And yet, He does want us to communicate to Him, to let our needs be known to Him, to let Him know we are sorry when we do wrong, to exalt and praise His name – to say that we love Him for who He is and what He has done, and to ask Him for guidance, help and protection.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the best example. We read in **Lk. 6:12** that before Jesus chose His twelve apostles ***"He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God."*** Earlier in **Lk. 5:15-16** it says, ***"the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup>But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray."***

To Whom would Jesus be praying? To His Father. Someone might ask, why did Jesus have to pray if He and the Father are One and if He indeed is God in the flesh. Because our God is a relational God and if you are in a relationship, there will be communication in that relationship – and loving communication is communion. You can't have a growing relationship unless there is time spent with another person and we are conveying our desires, or wants, our expectations and vice versa.

**Undoubtedly, Jesus prayed for three reasons** – First, to spend time with His Father and the Spirit so that He could be in communion with them. Second, to stay grounded and focused so that He could accomplish the mission His Father gave Him. Remember how later in the Garden

of Gethseman before He was arrested to be crucified, Jesus prayed, ***"If it be possible let this cup pass from me, but not my will but thy will be done."*** And third, to give us an example for how and why prayer needs to be a central part of our lives.

A perfect illustration of why prayer is so important can be found in the marriage relationship. The marriage between a husband and a wife is based on a commitment of love. But once the marriage commitment has been made, we don't stop communicating our love, do we? If we do, that relationship is not going to grow; rather, it will slowly die. If I am in communion with my wife, I will be spending time with her getting to know her and working together with her to live life and accomplish those things that give us purpose and meaning in life. And if we are both believers, that will not only include growing in our relationship with one another but with the Lord as well.

There is a reason why we are called the Bride of Christ. When we come to Christ and are born again and are committed to Him, we in fact are married to Jesus. That is why idolatry (anything that takes the place of God in our lives) in the Bible is often referred to as spiritual adultery. We are being unfaithful to God by worshipping and loving someone or something else!

So for us, the purpose of prayer is to grow in our relationship with the Lord. To stay focused so that we find and accomplish God's will for our lives and thereby impact others for the Kingdom. You may have seen in the news recently how there is a rapid rise in the number of pedestrians killed in our nation. From 4500 to 6000 in four years! It keeps rising. Why? One of the main culprits is distracted walkers! With the rise of smart phones people are too busy looking at their phones and not paying attention to their surroundings. They lose focus and then they get hit. Prayer helps us to stay focused and not get blindsided by the surprises Satan and life throw at us. And the third purpose of prayer is to be an example and an encouragement to others.

In fact, there is a reason why God's Word tells us in **Romans 8:34** that even now ***"Christ Jesus is He... who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us..."***

It is why we read a few verses earlier, ***"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom. 8:26-27).***

If Christ and the Spirit intercede (pray) on our behalf, how much more should we on the behalf of others? When we pray for others, they are being lifted up in the spiritual realm and it is a tangible way of demonstrating our love for them.

## **THE PLAN OF PRAYER**

Prayer's purpose is powerful. But if we are going to talk about prayer, we need to have a plan – what is the plan of prayer? We need to know what should be the emphasis of our prayer life. The Lord's Prayer is the foundation for that plan but it is not the complete picture. In the Lord's Prayer we find five main focal points – **Praise** – *Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy name.* **Purpose** – *Thy kingdom come thy will be done* (we have already talked about those two above). *Give us this day our daily bread* – **Provision**; *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us* – **Pardon**; *deliver us from evil* – **Protection**; *for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory* – again **Praise**.

But that is not the complete plan of prayer – that's just the front end. What is the completion of the Lord's Prayer? It is the Lord's Prayer part two! What Jesus talked about and prayed for on the night before He died.

We find out in **His prayer** that is recorded in **John 17**. Do you know what He emphasized in that prayer? First, he set it up with two main promises - Please turn first to **Jn. 15:7**: Jesus said, ***"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."*** The Word of God must be the foundation of our prayer life. It is what should inform and ground us in our prayer walks with the Lord.

And second, please turn now to **John 16:23-24**: ***"In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full."*** The plan of prayer must not only include the Word of God but also the name of Jesus, not simply for His name's sake but that means to pray with His authority and that which accords with His will.

**What did Jesus emphasize in His prayer in John 17?** Five main themes: 1) that they know the Father through the Son and have eternal life (vv.1-3); 2) that God the Father and Christ be glorified (v . 5); 3) to keep them from the evil one (v.15); 4) sanctify them in God's truth (vv. 17-19); 5) be perfected in unity (vv. 20-24); and the result of such prayers? *Joy* (17:13) and *love* (17:26) will be evident in the believer's life!

And notice once more Jesus prayed for others. In **John 17:9** we read, ***"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given Me, for they are Yours."*** This underscores the need for intercessory prayer. We are to keep others in our life – our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ, our neighbors and co-workers, strangers and even enemies in the forefront of our prayers. So the Purpose and Plan of Prayer have been revealed to us by Almighty God. Next week, we will look at the Practice and Power of Prayer.