

Midweek Message

“I desire then that in every place the men should pray ...” (1 Timothy 2:8a ESV)

As we continue on our journey through the various teachings in Scripture regarding prayer, one of the questions that often arises is this: “If God is sovereign and knows everything, why should we pray.” Think about it. If God is carrying out His perfect plan of redemption and, as Scripture teaches us, there’s nothing that can stay His hand, why involve us at all. After all, we have no power to change the mind of God or His purposes in this world. Well, I fully understand the sentiment being expressed in that question, but it’s coming from a very limited and finite human mindset that’s been corrupted by the continuing influence of our fallenness. Sure, God is sovereign and infinitely wise, and the truth is that only He can grasp the reasons why we should continue in prayer even though God is sovereign and already knows everything there is to know. However, since that question often comes to the forefront of many believers, let me just give a few reasons why we should pray to our Sovereign and Omniscient God.

First, we’re to pray because God has commanded us to pray and in doing so, we become obedient to Him. There are several Scriptures that tell us we’re to be a praying people. God’s word tells us to *“pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)), that we’re to be a people who are *“praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication”* (Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)), and even in our Scripture above we told that *“in every place the men should pray.”* We could go on and on regarding Scripture’s teaching that we are to be a people who pray. As those redeemed through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, we should want nothing less than to be obedient to God in every aspect of our lives. When we pray, we are, in fact, fulfilling one aspect of our calling as God’s beloved children.

Second, we’re to pray because God has chosen to work in and through our prayers. Jesus tells us, *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you”* (John 17:7 (ESV)) and James reminds us, *“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”* (James 5:16b (ESV)). Now, it may sound like an oxymoron for us to say that God is sovereign but then chooses to involve us in His work in this world. It’s certainly true that God doesn’t need us to pray in order for His will to be accomplished in our lives or in this world. As we’ve already established God is free to do anything and everything in accordance with who He is and what He desires to accomplish. And yet, God has chosen to involve us in all He’s doing. God is a God of means, in that, He’s ordered the events of this world and our lives in such a way that we enter into His purposes through our prayers. I’ll be honest in that I really don’t understand this mystery, but it’s how God has established His continuing work of redemption. We receive answers to our prayers when they are offered in accordance with God’s will as revealed in His Word and we enter into what God is doing.

Third, we’re to pray because doing so brings us into the very presence of God where we commune with Him. One of the difficulties in communing with God is that He’s not physically present here in this world. We cannot go to this place or that where we can actually see God and have a personal, one on one conversation with Him. With that being the case, God has given us an avenue by which we can communicate with Him and commune with Him, sharing our greatest burdens, our profound joy, our deepest sorrows, and our longing desire for His presence. The Psalmist tells us, *“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth”* (Psalm 145:18 (ESV)), and that *“When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit”* (Psalm

34:178-18 ESV). When we pray, we're not only communicating the depth of our hearts to the Lord who hears us, we're also communing with God as we draw near to Him and He to us.

Fourth, we're to pray because prayer strengthens us regarding the temptations we may face as we live each and every day. Let's be honest, in that, we all have a propensity to fall into various temptations that come our way. When Jesus was facing the horrors of the cross on the night before His crucifixion, He went into the Garden of Gethsemane to spend time in prayer. His desire was to continue God's mission for Him to face the cross and redeem His people from their sins. Prayer, in which He communed with the Father, was the manner in which He was strengthened as He would face that horrible death and bear the sins of all who would believe in Him. However, it wasn't only Jesus who needed that time of communion with God, He also told His disciples on that night, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40 ESV) and then later, upon finding them asleep He said, "*Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation*" (Luke 22:46 ESV). Not only were they to be praying, but they should stand up, so they didn't fall asleep. Temptation is a very powerful tool our adversary uses in order to get us to fail in our desire to love the Lord and obey Him in all things. That's why the writer to the Hebrews tells us,

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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" (Hebrews 4:14-16 ESV).

Jesus knows our every weakness as He too was tempted in many ways and yet was without sin. He is our High Priest who can, not only relate to us as our elder brother, but also lavish His grace upon us as we strive to live our lives in this world.

Finally, (at least for now), we're to pray because prayer reveals our trust in God's love for us as it matures us in our faith. I don't know about you, but I've seen and experienced many answers to my prayers over the years. Sometimes those answers have been yes; other times God has said no; and I'm still waiting on a few even today. I remember reading about one mother who said she prayed for her son's salvation for 18 years before God finally brought about his conversation. The Apostle John writes, "*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him*" (1 John 5:14-15 ESV). When we're living in obedience to the Lord, striving to glorify Him, walking in His revealed will, then the truth is, what we ask will be such as is according to His will and if what we ask is truly according to His will, why wouldn't God answer it? Now, that doesn't mean that God will answer it today, tomorrow, or any time soon, but He will if we're persistent and passionate in prayer over what we desire Him to accomplish for His glory and the blessing and benefit of His people.

Listen, even though God is sovereign over everything and has no need of our prayers in order to accomplish His perfect will in this world, He has chosen to involve us through prayer. We need to take advantage of this wonderful privilege and responsibility and even duty to enter into the presence of God, knowing that He hears those who earnestly seek Him and that He'll answer according to all He desires for His glory and our good.

Pastor Mark