

Towards A Deeper Understanding Of Prayer

A sermon series by Rev. David Johnson

Many years ago, as a small child, I would watch with great excitement a children's television show called Romper Room. You may have had it on a local station around here. It was a wonderful show that led small children through a gamut of games and lessons, with an emphasis on kindness, consideration, and good behavior. Just the kind of show we could use today.

But as the show would come to a close, the host would gather with the children and say goodbye, greeting the children who were watching from home. If you remember, she would hold up her "magic mirror" and say, "Romper, bomper, stomper boo. Tell me, tell me, tell me, do. Magic Mirror, tell me today, did all my friends have fun at play?" She would then name the children she saw in "television land," saying something like, "I can see ..." followed by a host of children's names. Children were encouraged to mail in their names, which would be read on the air (*first names only*).

Well, it took me a while to figure out that she wasn't really "seeing" each of the children she named. She was mentioning the names of those who had contacted her, and probably a host of common names who were most likely watching on TV. But she really didn't know all of the children she was naming.

That's where prayer, and Romper Room part ways. When we pray, we aren't talking to a fictional God. And neither is He listening to an empty mirror, or a faceless name. He knows you intimately and listens to each prayer, attaching a real person to each prayer He hears.

Last week we introduced our series on Prayer by using a journalist's favorite system of investigation, the 5 W's and 1 H of inquiry. If you're wondering what we mean by the W's and H of inquiry, we mean the "Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How of a matter. Last week we discussed the "What" of Prayer. And in the process we came to the following conclusions:

1. Prayer is a verb. Oh, it can be a written or predetermined text that one uses to appeal to God, as we do with the Lord's Prayer. But it must also be active and consuming, requiring the believer to get wholly involved. True prayer is not the quick, rote recitation of a standardized formula.
2. Prayer is simple; as easy as breathing. Prayer is the invitation of Jesus into one's life and circumstances. It isn't a complicated process based on memorized formulas, nor does it require elaborate speech.
3. Prayer is communication and communion with God.
 - * Prayer *is* talking to God.
 - * Prayer *is* an exercise of faith and a declaration of trust.
 - * Prayer *is* active and emotional. Prayer should be something that draws us, body and soul, into union with our holy and

sovereign God. Prayer requires the disciple to invest themselves emotionally, intellectually, and even physically when praying, regardless of whether the prayer is spontaneous or formally constructed.

4. Prayer is intricately tied to the issue of personal holiness. Scripture clearly unites the effectiveness of prayer with the righteous pursuit of the believer.

But that being said, we now move on to the next "W" in our study of prayer, "Who."

B. Who should pray.

Now on the surface, that sounds like a rather foolish question. Of course the obvious answer to the question of "Who should Pray" should be one word, right? "Everyone!" I mean, we just can't see why there would be anyone who shouldn't pray. But is that what God has taught us in His Word?

In the pages of the Scriptures we find over 300 references to different types of Prayer. And within those references we see the Bible refer to all sorts of people, and groups, who prayed. Here are several who are mentioned:

1. Husbands

Genesis 25:21 Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived.

2. Mothers

1 Samuel 2:1 Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation.

3. Men, Women, and Children

Ezra 10:1 Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.

4. Religious Leaders

1 Samuel 12:20-23 Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart....23"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.

2 Chron. 30:27 Then the Levitical priests arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard and their prayer came to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.

5. National Leaders

Exodus 33:13 "Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people."

Exodus 34:9 He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession."

6. A Nation

2 Chron. 7:12-15 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13"If I shut up

the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, 14and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15"Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.

7. Those in Battle

2 Chron. 6:34-35 "When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, 35then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

8. Anyone who seeks the Lord, even the foreigner.

2 Chron. 6:29-32 whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own pain, and spreading his hands toward this house, 30then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men, 31that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You have given to our fathers. 32"Also concerning the foreigner who is not from Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your great name's sake and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray toward this house,

However, even with all of these references, and hundreds more besides, there is one common denominator which applies to all of them. There is one element in every scenario which was necessary for each person/group praying, the presence of Faith. This means that in the end, prayer (*defined as intimate communion with a personal God*) can only be exercised by believers, the Bride of Christ.

Psalm 32:6 Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Psalm 34:15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous And His ears are *open* to their cry.

Psalm 145:19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.

For anyone other than a true child of God, prayer is simply an exercise in positive thinking, not a powerful connection with our creator God. But how can I say that? Because God's Word says it. God has no ears for the person lacking true belief and obedience, the two things necessary for a living faith.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Psalm 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;

Proverbs 15:29 The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

Proverbs 28:9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.

Isaiah 1:15 "So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

And it's not only the unbeliever that God refuses to hear. God states some conditions for even a believer who prays; doubters and the unloving need not apply.

James 1:6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

Mark 11:23 "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him.

1 Peter 3:7 You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

So in the end, as we seek to answer the question of "Who" should, or can pray, the answer is anyone and everyone who either has, or is desirous of, a relationship with Christ. For true prayer, the most intimate of spiritual unions, can only be experienced between a Bridegroom and His Bride.

Isaiah 61:10-11 I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, And as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise To spring up before all the nations.

Song of Solomon 7:10-13 "I am my beloved's, And his desire is for me. 11"Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country, Let us spend the night in the villages. 12"Let us rise early *and go* to the vineyards; Let us see whether the vine has budded *And its blossoms have opened, And whether* the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love. 13"The mandrakes have given forth fragrance; And over our doors are all choice *fruits*, Both new and old, Which I have saved up for you, my beloved.

So Bride, your Bridegroom longs for your attention and communication; Jesus is waiting for you to pray.