

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 11/10/2020

Mini Series – “Making Disciples -Learning to pray”

Part Two - “How you start prayer is critical”

Romans 8:12-17 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:26-32 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Most of us struggle with prayer. How often do you start to pray and suddenly random thoughts come into your head about jobs you need to do or people you need to contact? Sometimes we just pray through a list of names and problems, and feel that reading a dictionary out loud might have been more edifying. Maybe we start to pray first thing in the morning, then find an hour has gone by – not because we have been caught up in prayer but because we fell asleep! We can wonder whether our prayers are heard or make any difference, especially when we come away from praying apparently unchanged and find ourselves getting cross with our family, or another driver on the road.

There are, of course, times when we feel that we've been in the presence of God, but at other times it's just hard work. Why is this?

One reason is that we don't start our praying rightly – **how you start prayer is critical.**

There is a way to begin that:

- Enables you to be free of distractions
- Is more edifying than just working through a list of people and problems
- Keeps us awake and alert
- Leaves us with confidence that we have been in the presence of God, that he has heard and will answer
- Leaves us changed because we have experienced true fellowship with God.

We see this kind of praying in the Lord's Prayer (**Matthew 6:9-13**), and over the next few weeks we will be looking at this, with a view to discipling us all in this vital area of prayer.

Jesus, the prayer master, is teaching us how to pray and begins: Pray then like this (**v9**). He is giving us a pattern to follow, not a set of words to be memorized and repeated every time we pray. Although there is benefit in praying the Lord's Prayer as it is written, there is a danger that it can end up just as the vain repetition that Jesus warns us about in **Matt 6:7**.

Instead, we need to see it as a skeleton prayer on which we base our own praying. Jesus teaches us that we need to begin in the right way. **v9** Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven..

Prayer is talking with God, and so we need to begin our prayer with God, reminding ourselves who it is we are talking to – the only God, who created the universe and exists eternally as three distinct persons, all of whom are fully God, yet are one.

We approach God as Father, by the enabling of the Spirit, through the mediation of the Son.

Although we address our prayers to God the Father, in prayer we also experience fellowship with God the Spirit and God the Son. When we begin our prayers with God, who is utterly unique and stunningly glorious, then we will start to feel that we

have been in the presence of God, and our prayers will be more a delight and less a duty.

What does it mean to approach God as Father, Son and Spirit? Let us meditate on this with three aims in mind:

- That we will be led to worship – the true starting place for real prayer
- That we will see what an amazing gift God has given us in prayer - to have the ear of God
- That we will be motivated to pray and to enjoy real intimate fellowship with God.

How do we approach God? The Bible has much to say about this.

1. We approach God as Father

Not everyone can truly call God Father. Jesus is talking about those to whom God has given spiritual life, where a person is born again according to the will of God. This is a work of God by his Spirit. Those who are not his children show this by rejecting Jesus, even though they may be able to recite the Lord's Prayer from memory and say it every Sunday.

All who have received Jesus as their Saviour, and as Lord of their lives, have come into an intimate relationship with God and are invited to call him Father. **Jesus is helping us to see that, as God's children, we have unlimited free access to God the Father – an awesome privilege.** God is not some far away God who is unrelated to his worshippers – he is Abba, Father who dwells in the heart of every Christian believer, loving us with an eternal love, and he has committed himself to care for us. Our prayer time will be transformed as we start to meditate on this truth, but there is more to this:

He is our Father **in heaven**

Those who have had bad experiences with earthly fathers may struggle to come to God as Father. The phrase 'in heaven' teaches us important truths about God. He is unlike any earthly father. He is:

- holy God – Abba doesn't mean 'Daddy'. He is the God of glory before whom angels in heaven hide their faces so we approach him on our knees with reverence and humility.
- omniscient God – nothing is hidden from his sight and he knows our needs before we ask him so we come before him with honesty and confidence that he will give us what we need according to his wisdom
- omnipotent God – he created this universe and everything in it, and now sustains and directs all things so we come before him with confidence to deliver on his word, and to keep all his promises.

He is a loving, just, kind and gracious God – our prayer lives will be transformed as we start to meditate on the many aspects of who God is. If God were just God in heaven, then we would fear to come before him, and if he were just Father then we would have no confidence that he could do anything to help us.

He isn't just God in heaven or just Father – he is Father in heaven

Do you know God as father – not just as an intellectual truth or a phrase at the beginning of an oft-repeated prayer, but as a dynamic reality in your heart, giving you confidence to approach God? If not, take heed of the next point.

2. We approach God in the Spirit

In prayer we approach God as Father, by the enabling of the Spirit, through the mediation of the Son.

For the knowledge of God as Father to become a reality in our hearts, we need the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as Paul shows us in **Romans 8:15-16** (see text above). When we are saved, God implants his Spirit within us and the Spirit gives us the assurance that God is our Father. He does this through the word of God as it is written down for us in the Bible, speaking into our hearts as we read and assuring us of God's loving care as Father.

We lack this assurance because we don't spend enough time meditating on what the Spirit of God has said in the Bible – we might read our daily verse or chapter, but we don't go on to spend time prayerfully chewing over in our minds what God is saying to us through it.

If you want assurance that God is your Father, then allow the Spirit of God time to speak into your heart through the word of God in your Bible.

When we pray, the Spirit also works to enable our praying as Paul tells us in **Romans 8:26-27**. We don't know what to ask God to do in any situation, but the Spirit prays in our praying so that we come to pray in line with God's will.

**Prayer is much more than coming with a list of requests. True prayer is an encounter with the living God –
Father, Spirit and Son.**

3. We approach God through the Son

Take time this week to meditate on **Galatians 4:1-7**, but for now, let us consider the cost to God so that we could have the privilege of calling him Father in **vv4-5**.

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

As sinners by nature, we have no right to call God our Father. We rebel against him by doing things he forbids us to do, and failing to do those things he commands us to do. His response to sin is his righteous wrath. Sin must be punished, if God is to remain just, and the punishment is eternal separation from God in Hell. Yet God is love, and his love overflows to sinful humanity.

- How can God satisfy his own justice, and at the same time forgive sinners and accept them as his children?

The answer in the Bible is that it is through his own eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He takes our sin on himself, being punished in our place, while his righteous life is credited to us so that we can be accepted by God.

Through his death on the cross, he has redeemed us from sin, so that God can accept us as his children.

When he was on the cross, for the first time in his eternal existence he did not address God as Abba, Father. He cried out '**My God, My God**, why have you forsaken me?' (**Matt 27:46**).

He was cut off from his Father, and he did this so that WE might be able to say
'Abba, Father'.

True prayer is an encounter with God where we encounter God as Father, in the
enabling power of the Spirit, through the mediating work of the Son.

There is a way to pray without being distracted, that is more edifying than just
working through a list of people and problems, and will leave you with the
confidence that God has heard you and that you are being changed because you
have had true fellowship with God. It will come from a relationship born out of time
spent on your knees before God, with the word of God open, depending on the Spirit
coming in the name of Christ, trusting in his merit alone to give you access to God.
Pause for a moment before you pray. Read a passage from the Bible that points you
to the greatness and majesty of God, particularly as he is revealed as Father.
Meditate on that passage until the Spirit begins to convince you of the reality of who
God is. Praise will begin to rise from your heart, and prayer will be a true encounter
with God.