

"Prayer"

Text: Hebrews 4:14-16

"¹⁴ Since we have a great high priest, Jesus the Son of God, who has gone into heaven, let us hold on to the faith we have. ¹⁵ For our high priest is able to understand our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace. There we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it."

1. Mankind's greatest personal need is to learn to _____ on God. Another way to say this is that prayer is our "Declaration of Dependence" on God.
2. What is prayer? It is _____ with God.
3. There are 3 things that can hinder us from practicing prayer.
 - A. The belief that prayer really doesn't _____.
 - B. The fear that we won't pray in the " _____ " way, or use the correct words, or use the right formula and that because of not doing it the "right" way, God won't even bother to hear what we are saying.
 - C. The _____ struggle with the "little voice" inside us that tells us we've got more important things to do.
4. If we desire to have a _____, vital prayer life with God, there are 2 requirements that are essential that we have to develop: _____ and perseverance.

Episode #1: Acts 12:1-17 (Peter out of jail.)

"¹² During that same time King Herod began to mistreat some who belonged to the church. ² He ordered James, the brother of John, to be killed by the sword. ³ Herod saw that some of the people liked

this, so he decided to arrest Peter, too. (This happened during the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.)

⁴ After Herod arrested Peter, he put him in jail and handed him over to be guarded by sixteen soldiers. Herod planned to bring Peter before the people for trial after the Passover Feast. ⁵ So Peter was kept in jail, but the church prayed earnestly to God for him.

⁶ The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains. Other soldiers were guarding the door of the jail. ⁷ Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood there, and a light shined in the cell. The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Hurry! Get up!" the angel said. And the chains fell off Peter's hands. ⁸ Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And Peter did. Then the angel said, "Put on your coat and follow me." ⁹ So Peter followed him out, but he did not know if what the angel was doing was real; he thought he might be seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They went past the first and second guards and came to the iron gate that separated them from the city. The gate opened by itself for them, and they went through it. When they had walked down one street, the angel suddenly left him.

¹¹ Then Peter realized what had happened. He thought, "Now I know that the Lord really sent his angel to me. He rescued me from Herod and from all the things the people thought would happen."

¹² When he considered this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Many people were gathered there, praying. ¹³ Peter knocked on the outside door, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer it. ¹⁴ When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so happy she forgot to open the door. Instead, she ran inside and told the group, "Peter is at the door!"

¹⁵ They said to her, "You are crazy!" But she kept on saying it was true, so they said, "It must be Peter's angel."

¹⁶ Peter continued to knock, and when they opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. ¹⁷ Peter made a sign with his hand to tell them to be quiet. He explained how the Lord led him out of the jail, and he said, “Tell James and the other believers what happened.” Then he left to go to another place.”

5. What can we learn?

A. _____ is a powerful prayer. It is the act of praying on behalf of others.

B. The Bible is clear that all Christians are called to be intercessors. All Christians have the Holy Spirit in their hearts and, just as He intercedes for us in accordance with God’s will, we are to _____ for one another. This is not a privilege limited to an exclusive Christian elite; this is the command to all.

Romans 8:26-27 - **²⁶ “...the Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us, even begs God for us with deep feelings that words cannot explain. ²⁷ God can see what is in people’s hearts. And he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit speaks to God for his people in the way God wants.”**

C. Even when we have all sorts of _____ when praying, our humanity does not hinder our being heard by God. He knows we are growing, that we are in process.

Episode #2: I Kings 18:16-39 (Elijah and prophets Baal)

¹⁶ So Obadiah went to Ahab and told him where Elijah was. Then Ahab went to meet Elijah. ¹⁷ When he saw Elijah, he asked, “Is it you—the biggest troublemaker in Israel?” ¹⁸ Elijah answered, “I have not made trouble in Israel. You and your father’s family have made all this trouble by not obeying the LORD’s commands. You have gone after the Baals. ¹⁹ Now tell all Israel to meet me at Mount Carmel. Also bring

the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.”

20 So Ahab called all the Israelites and those prophets to Mount Carmel. **21** Elijah approached the people and said, “How long will you not decide between two choices? If the LORD is the true God, follow him, but if Baal is the true God, follow him!” But the people said nothing. **22** Elijah said, “I am the only prophet of the LORD here, but there are four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. **23** Bring two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose one bull and kill it and cut it into pieces. Then let them put the meat on the wood, but they are not to set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull, putting the meat on the wood but not setting fire to it. **24** You prophets of Baal, pray to your god, and I will pray to the LORD. The god who answers by setting fire to his wood is the true God.” All the people agreed that this was a good idea.

25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “There are many of you, so you go first. Choose a bull and prepare it. Pray to your god, but don't start the fire.” **26** So they took the bull that was given to them and prepared it. They prayed to Baal from morning until noon, shouting “Baal, answer us!” But there was no sound, and no one answered. They danced around the altar they had built.

27 At noon Elijah began to make fun of them. “Pray louder!” he said. “If Baal really is a god, maybe he is thinking, or busy, or traveling! Maybe he is sleeping so you will have to wake him!” **28** The prophets prayed louder, cutting themselves with swords and spears until their blood flowed, which was the way they worshiped. **29** The afternoon passed, and the prophets continued to act like this until it was time for the evening sacrifice. But no voice was heard; Baal did not answer, and no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Now come to me.” So they gathered around him, and Elijah rebuilt the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. **31** He took twelve stones, one stone for each of the twelve tribes, the number of Jacob's sons. (The LORD changed

Jacob's name to Israel.) ³² Elijah used these stones to rebuild the altar in honor of the LORD. Then he dug a ditch around the altar that was big enough to hold about thirteen quarts of seed. ³³ Elijah put the wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and laid the pieces on the wood. ³⁴ Then he said, "Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the meat and on the wood." Then Elijah said, "Do it again," and they did it again. Then he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it the third time. ³⁵ So the water ran off the altar and filled the ditch.

³⁶ At the time for the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah went near the altar. "LORD, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," he prayed. "Prove that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant. Show these people that you commanded me to do all these things. ³⁷ LORD, answer my prayer so these people will know that you, LORD, are God and that you will change their minds."

³⁸ Then fire from the LORD came down and burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the ground around the altar. It also dried up the water in the ditch. ³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell down to the ground, crying, "The LORD is God! The LORD is God!"

6. What can we learn?

- A. God can and will do the absolute _____ when called upon with a resolute attitude.
- B. God is not bound by the "laws of nature and science." He is _____.
- C. We need to consider how we perceive God:
 - Is He powerful enough to do impossible things?
 - Can He handle whatever happens to come our way?
 - Is He really that committed to you and your life to do whatever is needed or necessary to meet your needs and to demonstrate His amazing power?

Episode #3: Luke 22:39-46 (Jesus prays)

39 Jesus left the city and went to the Mount of Olives, as he often did, and his followers went with him. **40** When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray for strength against temptation.” **41** Then Jesus went about a stone’s throw away from them. He kneeled down and prayed, **42** “Father, if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.” **43** Then an angel from heaven appeared to him to strengthen him. **44** Being full of pain, Jesus prayed even harder. His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. **45** When he finished praying, he went to his followers and found them asleep because of their sadness. **46** Jesus said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray for strength against temptation.”

7. What can we learn?

- A. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, _____. Then, as His disciples, we should be equally as committed.
- B. Check out one’s _____ when praying. Jesus shows intensity, a fervent attitude, a determination to share with God His feelings and desires.
- C. He prayed for what He wanted: to be delivered from death. But, ultimately what He wanted more than anything else was to do what God _____ Him to do.

Episode #4: II Samuel 12:1-14 (David and Nathan)

1 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to David, he said, “There were two men in a city. One was rich, but the other was poor. **2** The rich man had many sheep and cattle. **3** But the poor man had nothing except one little female lamb he had bought. The poor man fed the lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food and drank from his cup and slept in his arms. The lamb was like a daughter to him. **4** “Then a traveler stopped to visit the rich man. The rich man wanted to feed the traveler, but he didn’t want to

take one of his own sheep or cattle. Instead, he took the lamb from the poor man and cooked it for his visitor.”

⁵ David became very angry at the rich man. He said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this should die! ⁶ He must pay for the lamb four times for doing such a thing. He had no mercy!”

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I appointed you king of Israel and saved you from Saul. ⁸ I gave you his kingdom and his wives. And I made you king of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you even more. ⁹ So why did you ignore the LORD’s command? Why did you do what he says is wrong? You killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and took his wife to be your wife! ¹⁰ Now there will always be people in your family who will die by a sword, because you did not respect me; you took the wife of Uriah the Hittite for yourself!’

¹¹ “This is what the LORD says: ‘I am bringing trouble to you from your own family. While you watch, I will take your wives from you and give them to someone who is very close to you. He will have sexual relations with your wives, and everyone will know it. ¹² You had sexual relations with Bathsheba in secret, but I will do this so all the people of Israel can see it.’” ¹³ Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Nathan answered, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You will not die. ¹⁴ But what you did caused the LORD’s enemies to lose all respect for him. For this reason the son who was born to you will die.”

8. What can we learn?

- A. Genuine confession of sin brings _____ forgiveness.
- B. When God forgives us and restores our relationship with Him, He doesn’t eliminate all the _____ of our wrongdoing.

C. No matter how miserable guilt makes you feel, or how terribly you have sinned, you can pour out your heart to God and seek _____ forgiveness.

D. We may be tempted to say, “If this is wrong, I can always apologize to God,” but we must remember that we may set into motion events with _____ consequences.

E. God stands ready _____ to forgive us of our sins.

Episode #5: Ezra 9; 10:1-16 (Ezra and intermarriage)

“¹ After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, “Ezra, the Israelites, including the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the people around us. Those neighbors do evil things, as the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites did. ² The Israelite men and their sons have married these women. They have mixed the people who belong to God with the people around them. The leaders and officers of Israel have led the rest of the Israelites to do this unfaithful thing.”

³ When I heard this, I angrily tore my robe and coat, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down in shock. ⁴ Everyone who trembled in fear at the word of the God of Israel gathered around me because of the unfaithfulness of the captives who had returned. I sat there in shock until the evening sacrifice. ⁵ At the evening sacrifice I got up from where I had shown my shame. My robe and coat were torn, and I fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God. ⁶ I prayed, “My God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are so many. They are higher than our heads. Our guilt even reaches up to the sky. ⁷ From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we, our kings, and our priests have been punished by the sword and captivity. Foreign kings have taken away our things and shamed us, even as it is today.

8 “But now, for a short time, the LORD our God has been kind to us. He has let some of us come back from captivity and has let us live in safety in his holy place. And so our God gives us hope and a little relief from our slavery. **9** Even though we are slaves, our God has not left us. He caused the kings of Persia to be kind to us and has given us new life. We can rebuild the Temple and repair its ruins. And he has given us a wall to protect us in Judah and Jerusalem.

10 “But now, our God, what can we say after you have done all this? We have disobeyed your commands **11** that you gave through your servants the prophets. You said, ‘The land you are entering to own is ruined; the people living there have spoiled it by the evil they do. Their evil filled the land with uncleanness from one end to the other. **12** So do not let your daughters marry their sons, and do not let their daughters marry your sons. Do not wish for their peace or success. Then you will be strong and eat the good things of the land. Then you can leave this land to your descendants forever.’

13 “What has happened to us is our own fault. We have done evil things, and our guilt is great. But you, our God, have punished us less than we deserve; you have left a few of us alive. **14** We should not again break your commands by allowing marriages with these wicked people. If we did, you would get angry enough to destroy us, and none of us would be left alive. **15** LORD, God of Israel, by your goodness a few of us are left alive today. We admit that we are guilty and none of us should be allowed to stand before you.”

16 As Ezra was praying and confessing and crying and throwing himself down in front of the Temple, a large group of Israelite men, women, and children gathered around him who were also crying loudly. **2** Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel the Elamite said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying women from the peoples around us. But even so, there is still hope for Israel. **3** Now let us make an agreement before our God. We will send away all these women and their children as you and those who respect the commands of our God advise. Let it be done to obey God’s

Teachings. ⁴ Get up, Ezra. You are in charge, and we will support you. Have courage and do it.”

⁵ So Ezra got up and made the priests, Levites, and all the people of Israel promise to do what was suggested; and they promised. ⁶ Then Ezra left the Temple and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While Ezra was there, he did not eat or drink, because he was still sad about the unfaithfulness of the captives who had returned.

⁷ They sent an order in Judah and Jerusalem for all the captives who had returned to meet together in Jerusalem. ⁸ Whoever did not come to Jerusalem within three days would lose his property and would no longer be a member of the community of the returned captives. That was the decision of the officers and elders.

⁹ So within three days all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered in Jerusalem. It was the twentieth day of the ninth month. All the men were sitting in the open place in front of the Temple and were upset because of the meeting and because it was raining. ¹⁰ Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, “You have been unfaithful and have married non-Jewish women. You have made Israel more guilty. ¹¹ Now, confess it to the LORD, the God of your ancestors. Do his will and separate yourselves from the people living around you and from your non-Jewish wives.”

¹² Then the whole group answered Ezra with a loud voice, “Ezra, you’re right! We must do what you say. ¹³ But there are many people here, and it’s the rainy season. We can’t stand outside, and this problem can’t be solved in a day or two, because we have sinned badly. ¹⁴ Let our officers make a decision for the whole group. Then let everyone in our towns who has married a non-Jewish woman meet with the elders and judges of each town at a planned time, until the hot anger of our God turns away from us.” ¹⁵ Only Jonathan son of Asahel, Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, Meshullam, and Shabbethai the Levite were against the plan. ¹⁶ So the returned captives did what was suggested. Ezra the priest chose men who were leaders of the family groups and named

one from each family division. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to study each case.”

9. What can we learn?

A. God is ___ going to change His laws and His commandments given to us, His children, regardless of what we think or do.

B. God desires our _____.

C. Our disobedience affects other people’s lives and _____ us from God’s fellowship.

James 5:16 says: **“¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”**

10. Prayer is God’s appointed means for us to _____ what we need from Him.

11. Here is a powerful secret for a dynamic prayer life. Count your _____ instead of your problems. Focus on what God has done for you instead of on how you wished things had turned out. Remember the goodness of God.

12. The late Oswald Chambers said it best: “Prayer does not equip us for greater works....prayer ___ the greater work.”