

The Dependent Church: Growing in Prayer

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[0 : 00] Hey, good morning. Guys, how are you? How are you doing so far? Okay, so I guess none of you actually heard myself teaching the Bible because I never actually stand in front to preach.

But I want to share a little bit on my view on prayer. So I hope that your group discussion will be helpful. Any group has, this question is not applicable to them, meaning that they already pray as often as they should.

Any group? Okay, so the question actually is, you're trying to identify what are the things that hinder our prayer. Okay, so I asked many Christian friends about the same question.

Why do we not pray as often as we should? And the response fell into two categories. The first category is that they tend to handle things in their own ways, meaning that there is very little consciousness of God in their own lives.

The second category falls into the fact that they are very skeptical whether prayer works in their situation in their lives. So these two categories of response, I want you to take the next maybe 15 to 20 minutes to really let you to be convinced and convicted by the Holy Spirit that the actual prayer is essential to our spiritual lives as water is essential to our physical lives.

[1 : 44] Okay, let's put that into our main theme of this discussion. So before I start, I want to briefly define what prayer is.

Okay, prayer simply is as us having an intentional communion with God. Intentional communion with God, not a casual chat. Intentional communion with God.

Some truth about Christian prayer that we may easily overlook and the implication worth to highlight here. So let's consider the main passage.

If you have the Bible, you can turn to Matthew 6. So this is where Jesus taught the disciples how to pray. It is also called the Lord's Prayer.

I think everyone of us, most of us actually are familiar with the passage. But we will refer to this passage with different references. So Matthew 6.9.

[2 : 45] Your fathers know what you need before you ask them. Pray then like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

First and foremost, I want to stress one important point. It is that our prayer assumes a father and children relationship between us and God.

So as a father, God wants to hear from us just as a good earthly father wants to hear from their children.

So I still remember how I love to hear my daughter's story in her high school. I want to know what makes her motivated.

[3 : 48] I want to know what makes her happier. So, me as a sinful and imperfect father, my desire is to provide her with whatever I can.

Right? To make her happier. So by the way, I did not tell my daughter about this. So, if you know my daughter, don't tell her. But how much more so our heavenly father is to us.

Think about it. Right? I am a sinful and imperfect father. And our father in heaven is perfect. So, in other words, non-Christian do not have this relationship with God.

It also means that whatever we talk about here may not be applicable to non-Christian. Okay? Second, prayer is being made according to our knowledge of who God is.

Unlike the Gentile God, Jesus told us in this passage, our father knows what we need before we ask of him. Okay? So, our goal of our prayer is then not to tell God about what we need as if he doesn't know.

[5 : 06] He knows. Okay? So, instead, we present our needs to God because we know that God is pleased to hear our prayers and answer our prayers.

That's the essence of our prayer. Okay. We would like to take the discussion into three reasons why prayer is essential to our spiritual lives.

Okay? The first reason, I noticed that you all have an iPad. When we address God as our father, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is the one and what he has done on the cross to make this relationship possible.

Okay? Correct? And it is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, convince us that we are his children. Sometimes we, why God is my father?

Why I am his children. Right? It's the work of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8.15, Paul told us, you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

[6 : 17] The Holy Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. So, the work of the Holy Spirit within us actually validate our status with our father.

Second, our father wants to hear exactly or really hear from us from our hearts what we really need.

Okay? It's not what we should ask for God.

Okay? Sometimes we're just trying to frame our prayer into something. Oh, let's ask God for whatever he wants. No. God wants us to tell her or tell him what exactly we want.

Okay? In Hebrew 10.22, let us come near God with a sincere heart and a sure faith. So, God really opened a safe space for all of us.

For us to pray for anything and everything. As long as it is a sincere desire from our hearts. Right? In our prayer, we also express our gratitude to God.

[7 : 26] Okay? If you look at the Lord's Prayer, we hallow his name. Okay? We think about how he treats us with his goodness and faithfulness.

We are counting the faithfulness and goodness of God. We are hallowing his name for his holy character. I don't know about you. I think there are many facets of God's holiness that we can praise him with.

Right? For me, I'm always amazed by this fact. That God is just. But he justified the wicked by paying the penalty of their sins.

Who are the wicked? We are the wicked. What area of God's holiness do you want to praise him with? That's the question I pose to you. Think about this. Right?

God has a lot of attributes that demonstrate his holiness. In our prayer, we also align our requests to God's desire.

[8 : 29] Mainly, what is God's desire or Jesus' desire? God's desire is the coming of his kingdom and the doing of his will. So this is in the Lord's Prayer as well.

Have you ever thought of God's providing us three meals a day? And a job to live and be part of his will as well? It is true.

Yes, this is also part of his will to provide us the necessity of our lives. And it is glorifying God when God provides us those needs.

Through prayer, God wants to build a trusting relationship with us. So when we think about prayer, it's to offer, to ask for something. But actually, God wants to build a trusting relationship with him.

The more we pray, the more we see God answer our prayer. And the more we can trust God. And in turn, this increase of trust will cause us to pray more.

[9 : 40] And not only for our petitions. God also wants us to draw close to him in a time of our difficulties. So the difficulties may come with different forms from your job, from your family, you know, the passing of loved ones.

A lot of those things. God wants us to put our hope into the right place. Namely, his grace and his mercy. Hebrews 4.16 The author encourages us this.

Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in times of deep. So we talk about prayer deepening our relationship with God.

The second reason why prayer is essential is that we cannot do anything apart from God. We desperately need to depend on him all the time.

The reason is Jesus himself expressed his total dependency to God. John 5.19 Jesus said, Truthfully, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord.

[10 : 57] Okay? And Jesus also later applied the same truth to his disciples. So which, I think, Kevin mentioned it. John 15.5 Jesus said, Whoever abides in me and I in him, he bear much fruit.

For apart from me, you can do nothing. So if Jesus totally depends on his Father to live his earthly life, how much more that we should depend on Jesus to live our own lives.

Also, according to the Lord's Prayer, Jesus alluded to a total dependence on God for all our needs. We depend on God for all our needs.

Our emotional needs, our physical needs, as well as our spiritual needs. When Jesus asked us to pray, Give us this day our daily bread.

It speaks to the fact that we depend on him for every spiritual or physical needs. Right? Every breath we take. Everything we eat.

[12:02] Okay? So when my, I think my son asked me when I pray before a meal, Why do you pray that for, You know, give thanks to the meal? Because you make money, You cost the food on the table, You pay for everything, And shrimp my wife cooked.

Right? Nothing God is involved. But actually, In the Lord's Prayer, God is saying the opposite. Give us this day our daily bread. Because everything behind it, Is what is God providing us.

The health of us. Right? The resources. Right? The friends. The wife. Or people who share the meal with me. So all God's. So asking God to forgive our debts, Points to our desperate need of his constant forgiveness.

Do you know how difficult it is when you have a relationship with a friend, That you hate him, Or hate her. It's very difficult, Right? You keep, So we need to keep that peace, Between the, In the relationship between us and God.

And this requires constant forgiveness. Jesus also asked us to pray, Lead us not into temptation, And deliver us from evil.

[13:21] He reminded us, God is the only powerful person, In this universe, That can help us, To fight spiritual attacks. It's not us.

It's not anything else. It's God. Okay? So we are totally dependent, On God in, Many, many aspects. Or all aspects of our lives. Now, Dependence on God is not, Just an event, Or something happens, In your family, Then you depend on God.

Dependence on God, Is a heart disposition, A heart disposition, That expresses itself, In our continuous prayer. Okay? So when Paul had the idea, With the church of Bethsaida, He mentioned, Pray unceasingly.

What does it really mean, By pray unceasingly? Praying unceasingly, Means that, We pray regularly. We have an attitude, Of God's consciousness, And God's surrender, At all times.

So, Prayer also, So, A heart disposition, Disposition of, Persistent prayer, Also means that, Prayer should be our first response, To every fearful situation, We are in.

[14:38] Right? To every anxious thought, We develop in ourselves. And to every hatred, We hold, Or we harbor against each other. Right? So this is what, Persist or unceasing prayer, Is about.

So we talk about, Prayer deepening our relationship, We talk about, We can't do anything, Apart from God. We need, Full dependence, On God himself.

Prayer is also, It's essential also, Because God answered our prayer. You don't know how, So God answered our prayer. Agree? Disagree? Okay. So, And we need to experience, God answering our prayer, In order to actually, Help us to have a spiritual life.

Right? Otherwise God is just, A remote person. So, Let's be honest now, Prayer is not, It's often our last resort, Instead of the first resort, As we talk about it.

And, We try everything on our own. Right? In the end, We cannot, We solve it. We come to God, And we pray to God. So, In the book of James, We see the same problem, Of the disciple, At that church.

[15:56] Okay? James 4.2, You do not have, Because you do not ask. You never ask. So, What James seems to be saying, God has the answer, Of our prayers ready.

It is up to us, To ask it, And pray for it. Okay? Apostle John, Even told us, To expect God, Has already answered, Our prayer, When we pray.

So, In 1 John 5.14, John told us, If we ask anything, According to his will, He hear us, And if we know, He hear us, Whatever we ask, We know that, We have what we ask of him.

Right? We already have it. Think about it. Expect. Now, You may ask a question, A lot of times we pray, God did not answer our prayer. Is it? True? Yeah.

So, Does God always give us, Everything we ask? And the answer is, No. Unfortunately. And, I think it's a blessing. Because sometimes, We ask for stupid things.

[16:57] And God will give you stupid things, You will become stupid. So, I'm glad that, This, This, This, This truth is here.

God is sovereign, Of all things. And God is sovereign, For all people. He will do whatever he wants. Right? His will, Does not depend on our prayer.

Okay? True? Otherwise, It will be a horrible, You know, The universe, Becoming a very horrible, Universe. God may say no to us, Because we are asking, With a wrong motive.

Or a wrong reason. And God is not going to give, Us things that will hurt us. You know, Sometimes we pray for things, That actually hurt ourselves.

Okay? If you don't know, Just try to find out. So, You will find something. Sometimes we ask, For the right thing. With the right motive.

[17:55] But God seems to, Still not, Answering our prayer. God seems to be, Very silent. I don't know if you have, That kind of experience.

If you have that kind of, Experience. Experience. We are, We are in, No argue. But, You are not alone, If you look at the scripture. There are many saints, In the Bible, Actually, Experience the same thing.

They pray, With the right motive, For the right thing. But still, God is not answering. I take a, Good example of, Paul. Paul prayed for, God to remove, The thorn of the flesh, From his body.

And God, Say no three times to him. Basically, The reason, Is that God wants to, Make Paul more reliance on him, In his ministry, In spite of his weakness.

Second, Very good example, Is when Jesus prayed, The cup to remove from me. God did not answer. So, God's ways is higher, And his plan is higher.

[19:13] And, I am very comfortable with it. But when we pray, We are, We can assure that, God always, Gives the best, For us. He, In, In Romans 8, 28, It will, We affirm us, That God calls all things, To work for good, For those who love him.

Right? This, We affirm, That God is going to, Have the best interest, For ourselves, When we pray, Pray to him. I hope you find comfort, As I do, That, Knowing that God is, In control of our lives, Not ourselves.

Right? If you are not comfortable with it, You can ask, Niels, Niels, Or Kevin, They may be able to provide you, A better answer. But I am very comfortable.

Okay, So, Let's get a little bit practical. What does it look like, To be a man of prayer?

Or, A woman of prayer? Okay, A good way of looking, At prayer, Is that, It is more of a Christian lifestyle, We adopt. When we pray, As an individual, First of all, We set aside, Quality time, To pray with God.

[20:32] Okay, This is important, Because Jesus asks us, To, You know, Go to a private room, And pray, Or have a devotion time with him. So, Starting the day, With a devotion time with prayer, Really put a lot of things, Into a proper perspective, For the day.

Try it, In the morning. I try, You know, I've been, Doing this for a long time. But it is really helpful. Pray unceasingly, During the day.

Okay, We mentioned about this. But how does it look like, In real life? I'll give you some examples. When I wake up, We pray for God's mercy, To cover my day.

When we go to work, We ask, God's wisdom, To handle, The task at hand. When we take care of our homes, We ask God for patience, With our children.

When we engage friends, We ask for graciousness, In our words. To build up one another. And when we go to bed, What we do, What we are doing, We give thanks to God, For everything, That he has provided us.

[21:47] So I, I hope you get the idea. And we should, Another thing, I sometimes notice, I sometimes notice, When we pray, We pray, Without a specific request.

Okay, So you simply pray God, To bless you, Without specifying, What you want God, To bless you for. That's a problem. How would you expect, God to answer you?

Alright, So, Make sure you put your request, Specific request, In your prayer. So in Philippians 4, 6, Paul told us, Do not be anxious about anything, But in everything, By prayer and supplication, With thanksgiving, Let your specific request, Be known to God.

Your specific request. It is through, Persistent, Asking, Of specific requests, God show us, How he operates, And how he provides to us.

It is a wonderful experience. I just want to share, A little bit on, The fact that sometimes, We do, We really do not want to pray. Okay, Sometimes, I experience that, I don't know if you want, You guys have that experience.

[22 : 58] Sometimes, We do not want to pray, And we do not know, What to pray. Especially in the time, When we are, You know, Far away from God. Okay, But be sure that, Even during those times, The Holy Spirit, Is praying for us.

Right? Roman 8, 26, Paul made this point, Very clear. In the same way, The Spirit, Also help our witness. For we do not know, How to pray as we should, But the Spirit himself, In the seat for us, With groaning, Two deeps of words.

So what does it really mean? I have an experience, I want to share with you. I recall, During the COVID outbreak, Okay? Where travel, Travel restriction, Is in place.

I was so anxious, About my son, Jeremy, His first trip, Going to Canada, But all by himself, To start his college life.

And I want to think, All the things, In my own hands. If I'll be honest, I really did not want, To pray to God, Because I did not want, To surrender, My view to his will.

[24 : 11] So I am kind of struggling, Suffering, In our anxieties. But at that time, The Holy Spirit, In past, Appoint, My heart, A question from God.

So let me just try to read it, So that I won't. So God is, Basically asking me this question, Where were you, When I took care of Jeremy, All along, In his life?

When you were, Completely unaware. So it really opened my eyes, To see the comprehensiveness, Of God's love. And I was, Of course, God, Brought me to, On my knees, For repentance, And also, My understanding, Of the, Death and breath of God, Is in a, In a different level.

So, Sometimes, Holy Spirit, Will do things like this. I still remember, Fast forward, To a few weeks ago, A similar worry came, I prayed, And was immediately reminded, Of my previous experience. The Spirit recalled, The same question, From God to me. And, In this time, I'm much better, Than last time.

[25 : 36] The worry, Did not bear, Any food in me. I slept, Like a pig. You see, The Holy Spirit, Is at work, In us all the time.

When you are sensitive, To the leading of the Holy Spirit, In your prayers, He will surprise you, With how much, God loves, And cares for you. A man of prayer, A woman of prayer, Also participate, In a corporate prayer.

Okay, We talk about, Corporate prayer. We talk about, Watermark, Monthly, Prayer Meeting. And I want to, Make sure that, You understand that, Jesus, In the Lord's prayer, Also, Has in mind, Of a community, Of believers.

When he asks us, To pray, Forgive us sins. Give us, A daily bread. Right? Lead us, Not into temptation.

Jesus, Always has a, Community of believers, In his mind, When he taught, The believers, How to pray. Okay, So, In other words, Praying together, With brothers and sisters, Is very important.

[26 : 49] And this is what, Is in Jesus' mind, All the time. We could learn, How to engage, God from each other, Through corporate prayers. We can pray for each other, We can, Confess sins, With each other.

You know, When you confess sins, Your prayer, Becomes much more effective. Okay, James 5, 16. James told the church, Therefore, Confess your sins, To one another.

And pray for one another, So, You may be healed. The effective prayer, Of a righteous man, Can accomplish much. So, I hope that you believe this.

I hope that, When we confess sins, With each other, We actually produce, Effective prayer. When we pray together, We also experience, The power of prayer, In unity.

So, We see this play out, In Acts 4, When the apostle, Was warned by the authority, Not to preach the gospel. And they came to the room, Praying with the brothers and sisters, And later on, God give them boldness, Including the brothers and sisters, That they invited to pray for.

[27 : 55] To proclaim, The God gospel, Even in those circumstances. So, There's a power, In corporate prayer, When we pray, In unity. Of course, We also want to encourage you, To form some prayer partners, Because, Monthly prayer meeting, Is not frequent enough, Kevin.

And, And, And we need some prayer partners, So that when we need somebody, To pray with, We have somebody. Right, We can pray as often, As we need to.

Okay, It's very important. So, I think, I'm all right. So, I just want to leave you, One more thoughts, One more thoughts, On the practicality of prayer.

If I'm honest, How often, Do our prayer, Like lip service, I don't know if you feel like, We pray, For example, Oh God, May you bless the church, With care and love.

And in our mind, We actually are saying, God, Please let Kevin and News, Or someone else, In Watermark church, To love and care well, For the church. What, My point is, Apart from asking God, Our needs, Prayer is also, Responding to God, With our participation, To address the needs.

[29 : 17] Okay, So, When we pray, For his kingdom to come, We are also telling God, That we are offering ourselves, As a living sacrifice, To facilitate the coming, Of his kingdom, When we pray, For his will to be done, We are telling God, That we are surrender, Our will to your will, Our desire to your desire, So, If we are praying, Like this, As a church, I'm sure our prayer, Will change us, And change the church, So, I want to stop here, Because, Of time, But I want to leave you with, Maybe late, Next time, I still have a, So, Let's do a five minutes, Reflection, Okay, So, The reflection question, Is in your, Hands out, And I put down some points, Some questions, To help you to, To help you to reflect on, You know,

The importance of prayer, And how and why, It is essential, To our spiritual lives, So, Keep that five minutes, And our, News is going to come, And wrap this up, Great, Why don't we get back together, And say, If you have a Bible, Turn or scroll, To Ephesians 3, I just want to, Close us with some, Final encouragement, So, We've, We've, We've seen our mission impossible, Right, We've seen, How difficult this is, Something we can never, Do by ourselves, We need the Holy Spirit's power, And, Well, We will only have, Holy Spirit's power, If we pray, And we will only pray, If we have faith, We, We really need to grow, In these things, But will God answer, Will he do this work in us, Well, I want to look at these, Last two verses, Of Ephesians 3, I think they're great, Verses 20 and 21, They're great, Because they come after, A prayer for the spirit, To change us, Which is, What we are, Talking about, And it comes before, This call to, Live a life, Worthy of our calling, Which seems so impossible, But this is what Paul, Prays, Verses 20 and 21, Ephesians 3, Now to him, Who is able, To do far more, Abundantly, Than all that we ask, Or think, According to the power, At work within us, To him be glory, In the church, And in Christ Jesus, Throughout all generations, Forever and ever, Amen, Now I just want to make, Two very simple, Encouragement from the verses, First of all, God is able, Right, That's very clearly, What it says, Now to him, Who is able, God is able, To do this, He's able to do, What we ask, Not just a little bit able, Right, He can do far more, Abundantly, Than all that we ask, Or think, So as we ask, To him to grow us, As he asks him, To change us, As we ask him,

To work through us, He can do far more, Than we ask, Or think, And I know, These are popular verses, Of course, We can apply them, To everything, Right, A few days ago, I was praying these verses, About our venue search, Right, I can think of a great venue, You know, Well, God can do far more, Abundantly than that, God can provide, You know, He's taking his time, But, Right, But actually, That's not what's in Paul's mind, He's not thinking of venues, What is he thinking about? Well, According to the power, At work within us, Paul is thinking of, God's work inside us, God's work by the spirit, In our hearts, Changing us, Making us live a life, Worthy of his calling, Right, That is, What he is thinking of, God is, More than able, To change us, Maybe you're struggling, With love, You're struggling, With patience, And you ask, The Lord, Change me, Well, Can we pray that in faith?

[33 : 19] Yes, The God who can create, A whole universe, Out of nothing, The God who can raise the dead, That God can change your heart, Even though you can't do it yourself, God is able, He can work in our hearts, He can make us the ambassadors, We need to be, He can work in other people's hearts, To bring them to Christ, God is able, And, Second, Not just God is able, Of course, Able is one thing, But second, God is willing, God wants us to grow, And change, Right?

Partially what he, He tells us to, So it must be, It must be possible, But look at what Paul prays, To him be glory, In the church, And in Christ Jesus, Now this is different from growth, But it's related, Right?

God's glory is involved, When we pray, God is glorified, When we, You know, When we do good deeds, And people see that, God is glorified, So, In a way, We are asking, Things to do with God's glory, And as we all know, That's very close to God's heart, Right?

God does everything, For the praise of his glory, That is ultimate, God will do everything, For his glory, And so if we ask him, To change us, Well we are asking God, To glorify himself, And he will do that, Right?

That's very close to his heart, So maybe you're struggling, With some sin, Will God change me? Does God want to, Want that? Well maybe, You're not sure, But actually, Does God want to be glorified, In your life?

[34 : 47] He wants to, Right? We know that, That's what he wants, And so, We know, We will do this, Right? He wants us to be, This beautiful billboard, Advertising his plan, He wants us to be, Ambassadors, Who beautifully represent him, In all the places, In Hong Kong, Where he sends us, We know that, Right?

And God, Of course doesn't, Answer directly, He doesn't make us, All perfect, He wants us to be dependent, But, You know, We are praying, For the Holy Spirit, To change us, Right?

To make us holy, Will the Holy Spirit, Make us holy? Of course, Right? So God is able, And God is willing, And so don't give up hope, Right? You can change, We can change, We can grow in this, And we can go, For this mission, God is able, To help us, God is willing, To help us, By the power, Of his Holy Spirit, When we pray, In faith, And then he'll do, Amazing things, In each of our hearts, And in our church, To the praise, Of his glory, Amen, Why don't I, Lead us in prayer, I think that sounds, Very appropriate, Our father, These are such big things, That we're asking, And yet we pray, To a God, Who is even bigger, A God, Who made the universe, And therefore, Has the power, To change us, To make us, The church, You want us to be, A church that fully relies, On the spirit, And by the spirit's power, Lives, And loves,

Here in Hong Kong, A church that, Prays, A church that sees you, That has faith in you, And therefore, Shries out to you, Unceasingly, Constantly, Father, We can't do this ourselves, By ourselves, We can do nothing, But, You can, You are able, And you are willing, And so we lay hold, On that in faith, Make us the church, You want us to be, For your, Great glory, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,