

"PRAYER IS..."

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Homeward: "A series about learning to orient our lives."

- **Disclaimer!** I have a feeling a few groups of people will not enjoy today's introduction message for our Prayer Series... "I promise, I'll get to you eventually."

Most of the time when we preach messages about "Big Important Spiritual Things" such as Prayer... We hope to sell their great benefits...

- Faith brings with it Courage
- Truth cannot be received well without Love
- Grace overflows with the presence of Forgiveness... And so on...
- And, I wholeheartedly agree... For I have come to believe the benefits, or "Blessings," of a life lived on these foundational elements is rewarding beyond my ability to communicate!

But, when it comes to Prayer, things seem to get a bit more complicated. Here's why...

- Prayer and its benefit are often taught as if it's a great lighthouse in a storm... "The captain of the ship looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message, "Alter your course 10 degrees south." Promptly a return message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north." The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So, he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am the captain!" Soon another message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am seaman third class Jones." Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am a battleship." Then the reply came "Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am a lighthouse."
- The sell is... "Once you embrace this picture of prayer... "You can always orient yourself within the storm's life brings." – So, Pray!

This is how Prayer is often taught... because it's a true aspect of it...

(Vs) Psalm 18:6 – "In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears."

- With Prayer, we CAN find God's presence in any Storm...
- But Lighthouses do more than just orient people, they also proclaim where the danger is by their very presence.

This is another true aspect of prayer...

(Vs) Psalm 119:35-37 – “Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.”

- Through Prayer we can discover where pitfalls in our lives might be...

But, there’s also a clear “Rescuing Element” to Prayer...

(Vs) Psalm 107:28-30 – “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and He brought them to their desired haven.”

- And yes, the lighthouse can point you toward safety, but no one in a storm ever saw a lighthouse and asked it to come and get them.
- There’s also Prayers of Lament and great Sadness...

(Vs) Psalm 143:1-4 – “Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. For the enemy has pursued my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore, my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.”

- Lighthouses don’t care if you’re sad...

What about Prayers of Celebration?

(Vs) Phil. 4:5b – “... The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

- Everyone knows that Lighthouses aren’t really there for the calm and sunny days... Unlike Prayer which is clearly there for all the weather!

You see... Prayer is more complicated than one “Classic Illustration” because people approach prayer from so many different places and perspectives...

- What we see within the Bible is that... **“ Prayer lies within a spectrum of places, positions, reasons, and even purposes.”**
- It is both Holding and Letting Go, Caring and Casting those Cares... Searching and Waiting to be found, and so on, and so on, and so on...

**This is really Prayer’s great “Selling Point”...
“Prayer is effective in every circumstance and situation.”**

For Instance: An Example of Prayer's efficacy despite different Spectrums...

- Everyone Imagine yourself as an... "Everyday Christian." lol!
- This should be awkward for some because we have a lot of people here who would not claim to be Christ Followers. And that's okay... We're a place for the Spiritually Curious... and we mean it!
- When I say, "Prayer is..." What's the first few words that come to an "Everyday Christian's" mind?
 - Positive: Important, Intimate, Hope Bringing... "Life Bringing!"
 - Negative: Confusing, Hurtful, Dangerous ... "God told me to tell you!"
- Prayer for these people can be experienced as all of this at once or separately.
- **Important!** You don't get to diminish this just because you don't understand it.
- These are the "Spectrums of Prayer" the "Everyday Christian" can meet God in. – I know Story after Story of people meeting God like this...

Now take yourself out of this congregational experience... Imagine yourself as an "Everyday non-Believer."

- This should be very awkward for some because we have a lot of people here who claim to be Christ Followers... But try and see all of this from the outside...
- When I say, "Prayer is..." What's the first few words that come to an "Everyday non-Believer's" mind?
 - Negative: Crazy, Fake, Purposeless, Displays Weakness... "Proves you can't make it on your own!"
 - Positive: Interesting, Depth, Encouraging... Could provide potential support..." – This is why Hospitals still have reserved parking spaces for clergy.
- Prayer for these people can be experienced as all of this at once or separately.
- Important! You don't get to diminish this just because you don't understand it.
- These are the "Places of Prayer" the "Everyday non-Believer" can meet God at. - I know Story after Story of people meeting God like this...

Communities that can embrace "Spectrums of Prayer" like this...

- They begin to report something very strange. People start to experience vibrant prayer lives... In other words, God meets with people...
- He finds them despite their spectrum of places, positions, reasons, and even purposes, and doing so... completely "Reorients" them.
- Imagine you find yourself standing in a busy airport terminal... People coming and going...
- When it comes to "Classic" prayer, some people believe they are standing in this lobby, staring at a huge reader board, waiting to hop on a "Prayer Plane" so that they can be whisked away from their problems, and it can be very true.
- But a God-met, "Reoriented Life" realizes that they might also be where they are for an additional or different reason...

- That they could be standing in this spiritual airport, staring at a reader board, not just of all the ways God can “Fly Them Away” from their problems...
- But, of all the ways the Lord has been bringing His presence to them... how He has been arriving from every direction and to every situation, He is there... Every circumstance, He is there!

This is what Prayer has always done...

- ... And, why people throughout the Bible have turned to it time and time again...
 - Praying while Angry and with Rejoicing...
 - Praying full of Sadness and Hope...
 - Praying while both Asking and Listening...
 - Praying Powerfully and with Weakness...
 - Praying Together and when Lonely...
- ... Like the very People in this room... Some Prayed because they were Lost, and some Prayed because they were Found!

Here's my favorite part...

- When God meets and then reorients people... Those people start meeting with other people... Walls come down, connection happens...
- ... And it's the reality that God has met them all, despite their different Spectrums or Differences, that becomes the very thing they have most in common.

So, wherever you are... “Prayer is...”

- Available, Willing, Pushing, Quiet, Convicting, Helping, Holding, Nurturing, Healing, etc....