

Teach Us to Pray - Class 4 Teaching Notes

Purpose: To help any disciple have a meaningful and consistent prayer life by (1) learning from Scripture, (2) hearing from seasoned disciples, and (3) addressing common obstacles to prayer.

Review: last week finished Lord's prayer (daily bread/forgiveness/temptation; thanks to MJ). I'm glad that we started with the Lord's template for prayer. One privilege: talking to saints

OVERVIEW: Why Pray? God is sovereign.

- Assumption in the question: if God is sovereign over all things, does prayer change things? Is prayer effective?
- Affirmation: prayer is effective

1. Scripture demonstrates and teaches that prayer is effective.

a. Demonstrations of God answering prayer (2 Kings 19, 2 Chron. 6, etc.)

- i. **Q: What are a few of your favorite answers to prayer in Scripture?**
- ii. Ex. 2:23-25 - During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

b. Teaching on the effectiveness of prayer

- i. Matthew 7:7–11 - Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!
- ii. James 1:5 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.
 1. **Did you notice the character of God in these past two verses? Generosity – earthly examples: unjust judge who initially ignores widow, fathers**
- iii. Mark 9:28-29 - And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." *This demonstrates that prayer is uniquely effective.*
- iv. James 5:16 - Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Theological Tension: God's Sovereignty

Two Scriptural Truths (D.A. Carson, *A Call the Spiritual Reformation*, p. 148):

1. "God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility."
 - a. Scripture – General (Prov. 16:33, Ps. 115:3); Natural World (Ps. 135:5-7, Mt. 6:26, 30, Job 38-41); People (Prov. 16:4, 9; 21:1, Eph. 1:11, Acts 4:23-30); Evil (Job, Lam. 3:37-39)

Generic

- i. *Prov. 16:33 - The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.*
- ii. *Ps. 115:3 - Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*

Natural World

- iii. *Psalm 135:5-7*
[5] *For I know that the LORD is great,
and that our Lord is above all gods.*
[6] *Whatever the LORD pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.*
[7] *He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
who makes lightnings for the rain
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.*
- iv. *Mt. 6:26, 30*

People

- i. *Prov. 16:4 - The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.*
- ii. *Prov. 16:9 - The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.*
- iii. *Ephesians 1:11 - In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,*
- iv. *Proverbs 21:1 - The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*

Evil

- v. *Ex. 21:13 - God let him fall into another man's hands*
- vi. *Ruth 1:13 - the hand of the Lord has gone out against me (viewing God as in control)*
- vii. *Job*
- viii. *Lam. 3:37-39 - [37] Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? [38] Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? [39] Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? (ESV)*

God is free to accomplish His will, nothing hinders Him – will of decree

2. "Human beings are responsible creatures – that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices; but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God's sovereignty or to make God absolutely contingent."

- a. Scripture - Is. 65:1-2; Lam. 3:31-36; Ezek. 18:30-32, 33:11; Josh 24:14-15, Rom. 10:9, 11, 1 Thess. 4:3-4
 - i. Josh 24:14-15 – “choose this day whom you will serve”
 - ii. Rom. 10:9, 11 – call to believe

God’s will of desire.

Intersecting Scripture:

- Gen. 50:19-20 - But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? [20] As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.
- 2 Samuel 24:1, 10 - Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”...But David’s heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”
- Is. 10:5-19 – *God appoints Assyria to be the means of His discipline for Israel and then brings wrath on them boasting in their arrogance.*
- John 6:37-40 – *Jesus won’t lose any appointed to Him by the Father, but those appointed will come to Him and believe in Him.*
- Phil. 2:12-13 - Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
- **Acts 4:27-28** – (Disciples praying to the Sovereign Lord, after quoting Psalm 2): for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.
 - Read: How do we see both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in Acts 4?

Not just a “why pray?” question but a “why evangelize? pursue holiness? do anything?” This is a larger question of human agency.

What does all of this mean for prayer?

Q: What does this mean for understanding “freedom”?

1. Our definition for “freedom” needs to be shaped by biblical understanding.
 - a. Misconception: freedom only works if human will is sovereign, unruled
 - b. Human will and freedom must be able to be preserved while maintaining that God is sovereign over all things. God’s judgment is fair and humans are responsible.

2. God relates to good and evil differently in His sovereignty. God is not culpable for the evil that He ordains and decrees.
3. God has ordained the use of secondary means. God's sovereign plan includes the choices of human beings. Sharing the gospel, striving for godliness and prayer are all means that He uses to accomplish His ends!

Read Carson quote, p. 160-161

What about prayer?

- **Ex. 32:7-14**
 - Why does Moses pray with such boldness? God's promised covenant / sovereign.
 - What was God's will of decree in this situation?
 - We can't claim to know definitively why God did it this way.
- Dan. 9:1-19
- Amos 7
- Lk. 22:42
- Jn. 17:1

"God expects to be pleaded with; he expects godly believers to intercede with him. Their intercession is his own appointed means for bringing about his relenting...in God's mercy Moses proved to be God's own appointed means, through intercessory prayer, for bringing about the relenting that was nothing other than a gracious confirmation of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The really wonderful truth is that human beings like Moses and you and me can participate in bringing about God's purposes through God's own appointed means. In that limited sense, prayer certainly changes things..." (p. 164).

God's sovereignty can actually encourage prayer rather than discourage it!

J.I. Packer's – Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God, p. 43, quoting Charles Spurgeon: "CH Spurgeon was once asked if he could reconcile these two truths to each other. "I wouldn't try," he replied; "I never reconcile friends." (Packer goes on) Friends?-yes, friends. This is the point that we have to grasp. In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbors; they are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are friends, and they work together."

Theories upon theories about how they work together – but what we need to know today is that they do work together and we must hold on to both of these truths!

Paul Miller, A Praying Life, p. 112

“The inability to see the connection between cause and effect is intrinsic to the nature to the nature of prayer because it is the direct activity of God. Trying to dissect how prayer works is like using a magnifying glass to try to figure out why a woman is beautiful. If you turn God into an object, he has a way of disappearing...Often answers to prayer start prior to the actual prayer. The only way to know how prayer works is to have complete knowledge and control of the past, present, and future. In other words, you can figure out how prayer works if you are God.”

God is sovereign and personal.

- The generous Father (would a Father give his son a snake / unrighteous Judge e.g.)
- The incarnation of Jesus Christ, our Advocate, Intercessor, Mediator
- The present and indwelling Holy Spirit

Next Class: Prayer Panel (May 21st) / Why pray? It doesn't work! (May 28th)