

- Today, we are going to do things differently from what we normally do. We are going to take a topic in scripture and see if we can unravel and properly explain it.
 - What makes it so different for us is that we are going to do so without going through the Bible verse by verse, only dealing with it when we get to that topic as we encounter it when teaching whatever book of the Bible we are in at that time.
 - And yes, I know what you guys are thinking.
 - What in the world, Pastor Greg, is teaching a topical message?
 - Look to the east – cause Jesus must be coming back, and who knows maybe He is!
 - But seriously, today I am going to take the topic of prayer and expound on it.
 - Our teaching is going to continue for a couple of weeks, but never fear and rest assured, once we are done, we will return to our regularly scheduled programming as I decide what Book or letter to start next!
- Today, we are going to begin a deep dive into the topic of prayer, and in doing so, I hope I can clarify a question I am often asked: What is the purpose of prayer?
 - Which is one of the most basic (but important) disciplines in all the scriptures!
- Now, before I start down this path, I would like to read from Acts 17:10-11, where Paul and Silas arrive in a place known as Berea
 - Upon their arrival, we learn something very specific about this group of people, a people known as the Bereans. And what is it that we learn?
 - First, we learn a vital truth about our Christian Walk.
 - Which is, we must never take anyone's word for anything (scripturally speaking) and then just run with it. Instead, we must do as the Bereans do.
 - What was it they did? Well, let's read and discover it for ourselves.

Acts 17:10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

- Real quick, why do you think I am beginning today's teaching with Acts 17:10-11?
 - Because when I finish our teaching on prayer this morning, I don't want any of you to walk out of here and say, "Well, Brother Greg said, therefore it must be true!"
 - Also, I don't want those of you who disagree with me (if there are any) to walk out of here mad!
 - Instead, I want you to listen, take notes, and either way, go study for yourself to find that these things might be true.
 - Dr. Chuck Missler calls the process the "Berean Way"

- The only reason I bring this up is because I in fact might say something that bothers someone, and to be honest, I kind of hope it does because that means you're listening!
- Having said that, instead of getting mad, I would hope you would go study for yourself to discover if what I said is either true or not true!
 - So, if you study it and you think I am wrong, then that's okay.
 - Simply gather your scriptural proof and let me know, because who knows, I might be wrong, and if I am, I want to know it!
 - So, call me and let's talk about it.
- And by the way, it's okay for Christians to disagree. Just in case you didn't know that!
- Remember, Paul and Barnabas split up at one point, and they did so over whether they should take John Mark with them on their second missionary journey.
 - You can read about their disagreement in Acts 15:39.
 - Paul did not want to include John Mark on the journey because he had previously abandoned them during their first missionary journey.
 - But Barnabas didn't care what he had done; he wanted John Mark to go with them.
 - Just as a side note, John Mark was Barnabas's cousin, just an FYI for context purposes.
 - So, they split up over the issue, but eventually, the scriptures strongly suggest they in fact settled their differences and reunited.
 - So, it's okay if we don't all agree all the time!
 - The key is that we must all stick together and simply agree to disagree!
- Moving on and back to the matter at hand, "Prayer." Repeatedly, I run into this question: Why, or what's the purpose of prayer?
 - And the answer is, well, it depends on who you ask!
 - If you ask the "Charismatic Hyper Evangelical" crowd, they will say, "to yield the outcome we desire."
 - By the way, I am painting with a broad stroke here when I say this.
 - I am not saying that it is what every single Charismatic believes, but rather I am giving you the predominant belief of the Charismatics, not all of them per se.
 - But certainly, the institution as a whole!
- Now, if you ask the less Charismatic but still evangelical crowd (evangelical means the denomination or people group whose sole focus is fixed on evangelizing), and they do so, forsaking all else!
 - Meaning, they operate as if evangelizing is all that matters, and it shows because that is their primary focus.
 - Having said that, they are not necessarily what I call the "name it and claim it people!"

- Name it and claim it, meaning, if you desire something, all you must do is name it in prayer, and you shall receive it.
 - They believe that prayer changes things, but not necessarily that God is like a genie in a bottle, waiting to grant our every wish, but they still have a skewed view of prayer!
- Next are the Hyper Calvinists. Not all, but many of them believe that there is really no need for prayer, at least in the way the traditional American Church thinks of it.
 - Because after all, God knows all, and the scriptures even testify to this very fact, just listen to:

Matt. 6:7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

Matt. 6:8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

- And so, if God knows what we need before we ask Him, then what’s the point of praying?
 - Next, we have (what I call) the “tweener” people. And they aren’t sure what to believe, as they are hung up in the middle!
 - This group is interesting because they possess just enough Bible knowledge and insight to see prayer from all sides, but that leaves them in a state of confusion.
 - In a place of “paralysis by analysis,” not really knowing what side to land on!
- And then finally, we have those who have studied this topic in depth and understand it through the complete lens of the entirety of the scriptures.
 - These folks are not confused!
 - This is where I hope you will be once we finish our study of this all-important topic!
 - So, there it is, a high-level understanding of prayer from a 4-group perspective.
- So, this morning, my question is, which category do you fall into when it comes to the purpose and intent of prayer?
 - If you don’t know, then that’s okay. My hope (as I said) is that after today or next week, we can clear things up for you no matter what side you find yourself on.
 - Because, this topic (among others), but certainly this topic is critical to your Christian Walk!
- Anyways, first I want to begin by giving you some scriptures where prayer appears.
 - We are not going to study all the places in the Bible where prayer is mentioned or where it is alluded to, because if we did, that would require us to study roughly 375 scriptures or scripture references.
 - Rather, I want us to go through a sample size (if you will).
 - But before I do, I want to begin by reading Genesis 1:1, and here is what Moses wrote:

Gen. 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

- Once again, Dr. Chuck Missler says, when you read Genesis 1:1 you believe it, the rest of the Bible is easy to believe!
 - So, remember that when reading scripture, especially scripture that may seem a little too hard to grasp. When you encounter those types of passages, just reflect on Genesis 1:1.
 - Because if you believe that in the beginning God created the Heavens and earth, then everything else you read in scripture becomes a whole lot easier to swallow.
 - Keep that top of mind as we go through today's lesson!
- Back to the topic at hand – prayer. Beginning with some scriptures that may cause some confusion (depending on which side of the aisle you fall on).
 - Now, before I begin, let me say, a few weeks ago, someone gave me a letter containing a list of prayers, and I told them I was going to do a study on prayer.
 - Specifically, God's purpose and intent for prayer.
 - And so, I am going to use that person's list and the categories that they placed those scriptures in, and then expound on some of them this morning, beginning with the category of:
- **Conditions For Proper Prayer:**

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

1 Thess. 5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

James 1:6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

James 4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

James 4:15 Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

1 Peter 3:7 You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

- Category of Right Relationships With Others:

Matt. 6:14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Matt. 6:15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Mark 11:25 Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

Mark 11:26 ["But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."]

Psalm 66:18 If I regard wickedness in my heart,
The Lord will not hear;

Matt. 6:7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

Matt. 6:8 "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- Category of How to Pray:

Luke 11:8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

Eph. 6:18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,
Eph. 6:19 and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,
Eph. 6:20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

1 Thess. 5:17 pray without ceasing

- Category of God's Promises to Answer Prayer:

John 14:13 “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:14 “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

John 16:24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

1 John 3:22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

Matt. 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Matt. 7:8 “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Matt. 7:9 “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone?

Matt. 7:10 “Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he?

Matt. 7:11 “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Matt. 18:19 “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.

Matt. 18:20 “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am

there in their midst.”

Mark 11:24 Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.

Matt. 21:22 “And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

Luke 11:9 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Luke 11:10 “For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

- The person who handed me this letter wrote the following at the end of this list: they said, “This sounds fairly positive, however, the traditional pulpit approach to God answering prayer is sometimes YES, sometimes NO, and quite often WAIT”
 - Let me expound on that statement for just a second. I have heard this same thing said throughout the years, and although it may be true at times, true that God says Yes or No or Wait in the way He responds, to be honest that statement is more often than not (in my opinion) a way of giving a non-answer when whatever a person prays for doesn’t happen!
 - Which is fine, but I would say that there is more to it than that, and we will try to flesh that out as we do a deep dive into this topic of prayer!
- The final category is “The role of the Holy Spirit”

Matt. 6:7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

Matt. 6:8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Rom. 8:26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words;

Rom. 8:27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*.

- Now, before we begin our journey of prayer this morning, let me make two statements.
 - First, many more scriptures mention prayer, or as I said, many scriptures allude to prayer in some way. I am just taking a few, but regardless of how many there are, we should see consistency in the ones we are studying.
 - Which tells us that no matter which scriptures we are dealing with concerning

prayer, when we see the consistency, it means that we can apply that same consistency to all scripture across the board.

- Second, I want you to remember what my mentor and close friend Stephen Armstrong used to say: “When the plain sense makes common sense, we seek no other sense, and when it doesn’t, we must dig deeper.”
 - That simply means that when we read something that makes sense and lines up with the consistency of scripture, we go with what it says, but when it doesn’t, we must dig deeper, because I assure you that there is no inconsistency in God’s Word!
- Now, when studying the topic of prayer, I am often asked, “Can we, through our prayers, change God’s mind?”
 - In other words, if God is intent on allowing or causing something to happen to someone, can we pray and change His mind?
 - An example being death. If someone is sick and dying, can we pray and ask God to heal them, even though God intends for them to pass away?
 - First, let’s try answering our question by establishing a logical but fundamental truth of scripture, and not only scripture but of life as well!
 - It is impossible for the creator of anything to be surprised by his or her own creation. In other words, a painter has never created a painting and then stepped back and said, “Lookie there, my word, it’s a picture of mountains.”
 - Or a sculpture says, “Look, I can’t believe it, I was just sculpting away, with no idea of what I was sculpting, and voila, an eagle appeared.”
 - The Creator of anything obviously knows what they are creating before they start.
- So, the answer to whether God changes His mind really makes no sense, logically speaking, because that theory would have to assume that God the Creator could learn something new inside of His own creation.
 - Which would mean, as He was headed in one direction, for one reason, he suddenly learned something new, and because of that new information, He then changed His mind!
 - If that’s the case, then we are all in trouble because we are no longer serving an all-knowing, omnipotent God!
- Next, using logic once more, we must know and understand something else as believers. God has purpose and intent in everything He does!
 - Meaning, when He created this world, He did so with a timeline in mind, and we know this to be true because we see it throughout the scriptures.
 - The Bible clearly tells us; things will happen at certain appointed times.
 - Which means, this creation we live in is on a timer, a countdown.
 - We also know this from the pages of scripture:

Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

**And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”**

- So, our birth was clearly an appointment. But what about our death?
 - Let's see what Hebrews 9:27-28 says about this:

Hebrews 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,

Hebrews 9:28 so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.

- These verses establish something, and that is that things are progressing along a specific timeline.
 - Certain events (like life and death) take place at very specific appointed times, and God uses us, Christian men and women, to bring many of those events into fruition!
 - Therefore, for God to change His mind, He would also have to change His will.
 - His purpose and intent for His creation!
 - And that is simply not going to happen.
- This is so important for us to grasp, because if you don't understand these last two concepts, then you can never begin to truly understand the purpose and intent of prayer!
 - Because your understanding is established with the wrong foundation in mind!
 - Also, let me say that the scriptures themselves confirm what I am saying!
 - Let me read a few places in the scripture where we get confirmation of this very thing.
 - Turn with me if you will to Malachi 3:6, and here is what Malachi had to say on the matter of God changing His mind:

Malachi 3:5 “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:6 “For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent;

**Has He said, and will He not do it?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?**

- The concept here is simple: God is not us. He is not a man and therefore, He does not act or respond the way we do.
 - Meaning, where we might change course in our decisions, God does not!
 - Praise be to God for that, because who wants to serve a wavering God?

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever.

**Psalms 110:4 The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,
“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek.”**

1 Samuel 15:29 Also the Glory of Israel will not lie nor change His mind; for He is not a man, that He would change His mind.”

- Now, if I am being completely honest with you, at the core of the confusion surrounding prayer lies a fundamental misunderstanding concerning our place and position inside God’s creation.
 - Meaning, when you begin with a thought process that says, “God is doing what He is doing because of us,” then you automatically begin heading down the wrong path, because in God’s dichotomy, we are not the center of the universe. God is!
 - And if that’s true, and I assure you it is, then when we pray, we don’t pray with ourselves and our desires in mind. We pray with God’s will in mind!
 - And that statement takes me to the Lord’s prayer. The Lord’s prayer is critical if we are ever going to properly understand the whole concept of prayer.
- So, turn with me if you will to Matthew 6, where we pick up with Jesus as He is doing a little teaching with His disciples on the topic of prayer, and let’s see what He has to say concerning this issue.

Matthew 6:1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 6:2 “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matthew 6:3 “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

Matthew 6:4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:5 “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matthew 6:6 “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Matthew 6:7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

Matthew 6:8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Matthew 6:9 “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Matthew 6:10 ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:11 ‘Give us this day our daily bread.

Matthew 6:12 ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matthew 6:13 ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]’

- First, let me say that Jesus is not mandating the words to pray, as in the exact words we are to pray!
 - And we know this to be the case because prayer should never be grope or repetitious, and the Lord’s prayer tells us this very thing.
 - Instead, it should be personal. Having said that, the Lord’s prayer does give us a framework for prayer.
 - Meaning, it gives us the structure or format and intent of how we should pray.
 - I want you to notice who is in view in this prayer.
 - Meaning, who is the focus of this prayer framework?
 - It’s God, not man!
 - Which means our prayers must line up with God’s will.
 - We know this is true because that is exactly what James and 1 John tell us.
 - Our prayers must contain one essential element, and that is God’s will be done!
- Now, today’s message is what I call a setup day. Today’s lesson is about establishing a fundamental and baseline understanding of God and His Sovereignty over His Creation!
 - And once we garner that understanding, it will ground us and keep us on the right track as we dig deeper into some of those confusing and sometimes controversial scriptures!
 - I would like to say one more thing before we finish this morning.
 - Something that sometimes makes people a little uncomfortable. It shouldn’t make them uncomfortable, but it does.

- And that is that we can all agree that God is doing something inside of His Creation.
- We can also all agree that God knows exactly what He is doing.
- If we are to understand any topic of scripture that is controversial or confusing, especially prayer and its purpose, we must also understand my next point.
- Although God knows what He is doing, we in fact do not know what He is doing.
 - Meaning, we are never explicitly told in scripture, 100% why God created this whole thing in the first place.
 - We do get a few hints and glimpses of the benefits we receive through His creation.
 - We are told in places like Revelation and Colossians that we were created by Him and for Him.
 - Specifically for His good pleasure!
 - But there is more to it than that, and we will be exploring that more in-depth the next time we study this topic.
 - For now, know this: God is doing something, and we are not privy to all that He is doing.
 - God didn't establish this creation because He needed a buddy or a friend.
 - If He did, then why the fall in the Garden?
 - And why Sin?
 - Did He want His buddies to suffer?
 - That makes no sense. There is more going on here, and we are not told what it is.
- So, by faith we believe in God, we trust Him, and we obey, and when He says to pray, then we pray.
 - When he says give, we give
 - And when He says to love thy neighbor as thyself, so we do it.
 - Obedience is the key here, folks.
 - So, we don't need to know why He tells us to do it, we just do it!
 - Amen – Amen!