

WHEN THE SPIRIT PRAYS

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, May 20, 2012

Have you ever prayed?

Have you ever prayed earnestly? Desperately?

Have you prayed energetically? Passionately? Loudly?

Do you wish you could pray more effectively?

Does anyone feel like they pray *really* well?

Can I tell you, that's the nature of the beast. Prayer is humbling work. It is bowing at the feet of Almighty God. Sometimes we are singing His praises and experiencing overcoming power for life's challenges. But sometimes we feel weak and helpless, though we know we are welcome in God's presence—we feel small.

It's okay, because the effectiveness of your prayers is not based on how you feel—before, during, or after having prayed.

He Is Able

The power of prayer is not in the one who prays, but in the One to whom you pray! God is "*able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope*" (Ephesians 3:20).

The more literal rendering of the New American Standard Bible says that God is "*able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.*" God is not only able to do *what* we ask or think, He is able to do it *abundantly*. He is able to do it *more* abundantly. In fact, He is able to do it *far* more abundantly.

As if that weren't enough, God is not only able to do far more abundantly than we could ask, He is also able to do *beyond* all that we ask. That means He will not only cover what you need, but He'll go beyond what you think you need, because He loves you that much!

So, praying may be hard, and praying may be humbling, but praying is *good!* We all need to do more praying.

All this month, we are considering how the Holy Spirit works in our lives as we follow Jesus Christ. Two weeks ago, we were excited to know that the Spirit speaks today—through the Scriptures and through His people. Last weekend, we learned how He energizes our praise and worship of God. Next Sunday will be the anniversary of the descent of the Spirit and the birthday of the Christian church. But today, we will discover how the Holy Spirit amplifies our prayers.

Teach Us To Pray

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Evidently, just to observe Jesus praying was a moving experience! More than that, it was a convicting experience. Watching Him pray, one of His disciples realized that for all that he knew about praying, and for all the prayers he had learned to say, the thing he lacked most was motivation and direction.

Jesus prayed with ease; He was comfortable in the presence of God. Jesus prayed with passion; He was confident of the power of God. And, Jesus prayed often; He was consumed with the purpose of God.

It was not so much the “how to” this disciple felt he lacked, but the “will to.” Jesus was undoubtedly the wisest and strongest individual the disciple knew, yet Jesus prayed frequently. So, he was moved to ask, “Lord, teach me to pray.” Can you identify with that?

Let me be clear about one thing right from the start. The Holy Spirit will not do your praying for you. He does not pray in your place. Instead, He energizes, directs, amplifies, and empowers your praying.

Of course, that assumes that you *are* praying to begin with. You can’t ride a dead horse. You can’t turn a ship at anchor. If you want the Holy Spirit’s help, you need to *start praying*, no matter how fitful it may be, or how pitiful it may seem to you. Get moving, and He will come alongside and help you.

Now, let’s see just how the Spirit helps us to pray.

Follow the Pattern

Jesus answered the disciple’s request by giving him the Model Prayer (aka the Lord’s Prayer or the “Our Father”). Why do I call it the “Model Prayer”? Because it was given as a model—a pattern to follow—not a poem to recite. Discover the pattern, and your prayer times will flourish and grow.

Matthew 6

⁷ *“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸ Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! ⁹ Pray like this:*

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

¹⁰ *May your Kingdom come soon.*

May your will be done on earth,

as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today the food we need,*

¹² *and forgive us our sins,*

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

¹³ *And don’t let us yield to temptation,*

but rescue us from the evil one.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Jesus didn’t say, “Pray these words.” He said, “Pray *like* this.”

Here is the pattern:

1. Pray as a member of God’s faithful community (not as a lone individual)—“our,” “us,” “we.”
2. Pray to Our Heavenly Father (not to yourself, or to a statue or a picture, not to the church building, not even to Jesus), who is holy. Hold Him in reverence.
3. Join God in His purpose to reveal His Kingdom through those who do His will on earth.

4. Ask for God's generous provision of our daily needs.
5. You have been forgiven. Now, practice forgiveness, so you may be forgiven again.
6. Pray for protection. Your enemy, the devil, roams around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour someone.
7. Exalt the Lord, who is altogether worthy.

Everything that you need, everything for which you are concerned will fit into one of the elements of this pattern. If we boil it down to just seven words, the pattern may look like this:

1. Praise
2. Purpose
3. Provision
4. Penitence
5. Peacemaking
6. Power
7. Protection

As you follow this pattern in your praying, the Holy Spirit will work actively within you, for you are praying the way that Jesus taught, and the Holy Spirit loves to glorify Jesus through your life.

Beyond What You Ask

Words come easily for some, who are naturally verbal or trained in public speaking. Praying, however, is not just about what you can say. In fact, if you have never come to the end of your words in prayer, you haven't prayed much.

And there are others, for whom words are a struggle—they come only haltingly. If that's you, be encouraged: the depth and effectiveness of your prayers is not determined by the words you use. In fact, words aren't even necessary!

Isaiah 65

²⁴ I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!

And there are times when the Spirit will *give* you the words to say—the very words. You may see things and say things that you had not preconceived—they just come—as He energizes your praying.

God is able to do *beyond* all that we can ask or imagine! He can do *more* than we know to ask for. Sometimes, we simply don't know what to ask for, yet God is still listening.

Inarticulate Utterances

Romans 8

²⁶ And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.

As I said earlier, the Holy Spirit does not do our praying for us, but He does pray *through* us. He energizes our praying, and makes sense of our sighing and groaning. But there's more! The Holy Spirit also can turn our sighs and groans into a language of His own. This is what Paul referred to as "praying in tongues"—utterances that cannot be articulated.

1 Corinthians 14

¹⁴ For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don't understand what I am saying.

¹⁵ *Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand.*

If I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying—sighing, groaning, crying out—in words the Holy Spirit gives me, a language that is given, not learned—what Paul elsewhere described as “tongues of angels” (1 Corinthians 13:1). Therefore, my mind does not understand. This is not my mother tongue, or any language I have learned.

What good is this kind of praying? Much in every way! God understands my praying in tongues, for through the Holy Spirit I am communicating with God on His own level, bypassing the limitations of my own intellect. I don't have to know the need, or the words to use to describe it. I just pour my love and compassion into the words the Spirit gives me and God gets the message. Listen to Paul's teaching again.

Romans 8

²⁶ *And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.* ²⁷ *And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.*

The Spirit always prays according to the will of God, even when, in my own mind, I am uncertain of what God wants to do. This is the closest you will ever come to *perfect* praying.

The Good Life

And, do you know what comes after this? Are you familiar with verse 28? Many people can quote verse 28 alone, but today I want you to see the connection: verse 28 is linked to verses 26 and 27.

Romans 8

²⁶ *And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.* ²⁷ *And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.* ²⁸ *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

This context suggests that God causing everything to work together for our good is directly related to, if not the result of, our praying in the Spirit. “The good” is God's will for your life. That's what the Spirit prays for (and knows *how* to pray for). Will you partner with Him in that?

How often should you pray in the Spirit?

Ephesians 6

¹⁸ *Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

Jesus taught us to pray in the context of community, based on our relationships in the family of God. Paul reminds us that this is also how the Spirit prays through us.

What good is this kind of praying? It builds us up in our faith. It keeps us saturated with the love of God. It keeps us hopeful. I love the way Eugene Peterson translated Jude 20-21.

Jude (MSG)

²⁰ *But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ staying right at the center of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life!*

If you want to walk in the unending life—the *real* life— practice praying in the Spirit. Learn to let the Spirit pray through you. Don't be earthbound by your thinking, set your mind on heavenly things. Begin to wade in the world of "far more abundantly beyond," until you find "water to swim in."

Let's pray these words together today:

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.*