

## MADE TO CONNECT

*Series: Plugged into Prayer*

John 16:23-24; Romans 8:15-16; 26-27

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Not long ago, our church's printer quit working. It had a malfunction where the little touch screen wouldn't turn on. So I called the customer service number for help fixing it. I tell them about the screen not turning on and the first thing they asked is, Is it plugged in? Now, it might seem like an obvious thing but isn't it true that many times you or I couldn't get something to work and then we realized Oh, it's just not plugged in! It's so basic we assume it is or we forget! In a similar way, when things are malfunctioning in our lives, we need to go back to the obvious question: Am I plugged in? Am I really connecting with the Lord? Because we are completely dependent upon Him for light and life and were designed for a relationship with Him. When that relationship isn't where it should be, there's going to be malfunctions. That's what we want to talk about today.

In this series on prayer we're looking at prayer as our connection with God. Prayer isn't an end in and of itself. Prayer is not just a grocery list of wants to take to God. It's not just exchanging information with God. It's about developing a real relationship with Him—and as we'll see today, every member of the Trinity is involved. Sometimes prayer for the Christian with a Triune God is interesting. Who do we pray to? To the Father? Or Jesus? What's does it mean to pray in the Spirit? We're going to address that today, and I'm excited to because enjoying our prayer life requires confidence and that comes through biblical clarity.

### I. THE FATHER & THE SON'S INVOLVMENT IN PRAYER. (John 16:23-24)

*23 In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.*

So the context here is what Bible students call the *Upper Room Discourse* (John 13-17). It's a block of teaching that Jesus started giving to the disciples in the upper room of the house (Mark 14:12-15) where they observed the Passover meal on the night of His betrayal. He started this block of teaching in the upper room and then it appears that He continued to teach as He left Jerusalem and made His way across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives where He was eventually arrested (John 14:31). In this discourse, Jesus is explaining to them that He is going to leave and return to the Father, leaving the disciples confused and grieving. So Jesus promises that though He is going to leave, He will return again and He will send them the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide them. And I think that's the day that He is talking about in verse 23: the day after His ascension when they received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 and a new age dawned.

And because Jesus would then be absent from them, they would start to **pray to the Father in His name** and their prayers would be answered (v. 23). This isn't a blank check on our prayer requests by the way. He isn't like Jim Carey in the movie *Bruce Almighty* where he just responds to everyone's prayer with a "Yes." Instead of *Yahoo!* he used *Yahweh!* God answer our prayers according to His will. Sometimes it's yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait. But a few times Jesus in this discourse that's how Jesus says to pray: to the Father in His name (14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24). That's something they hadn't done before. But that's our first point today.

### **We can pray to the Father.**

Like we talked about last week in *the Lord's prayer*, we pray to a heavenly Father. And we need to note that when prayer is mentioned in the Bible that is associated with the members of the Trinity, almost always the prayer is **directed to God the Father**. Jesus says to pray to the Father. Jesus, by His own example, prayed to the Father (John 17). The Apostle Paul speaks of his own prayers to the Father. In Ephesians 3 he said, "*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.*" As children of God, we pray to our heavenly Father just like Jesus did.

There are a few exceptions though. Sometimes prayer is offered to "God" or to "the Lord" *generally* without a specific designation to the Father (**Acts 4:24**). We pray that way all the time without getting specific. Another exception is **Romans 10:13** where there is a prayer for salvation. "*All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*" In the context, "Lord" is referring to Jesus. We can also call out to Jesus. In **John 14:13-14**, Jesus said, "*Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.*" There Jesus says we can pray directly to Him (Jesus) and He'll answer our prayer to the glory of the Father. That brings up the next point:

### **We can pray through the Son.**

That's what He means by praying **in His name** (John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23-24). Paul said he prayed "*to God through Jesus*" (Rom. 1:8). Why through Jesus? Because having returned to the Father, He is now the believer's heavenly **Mediator** and **High Priest**. Having become one of us and died for us, He now represents us before the Father. This is a necessary ministry we need because there is a great chasm between man and God. He is holy and men are sinners, and our sin creates a gap between us and God (Is. 59:1-2). In the OT, that gap was temporarily and partially bridged through the priests and the sacrifices that were offered. They were like a credit card that covered man's sin debt until Jesus came and paid it off. But those sacrifices and priests were designed to teach us of the separation between us and God so that we would look for the ultimate and eternal High Priest and sacrifice that is Christ (Heb. 2:17; 8:6; 12:24). Because His priesthood and His sacrifice are perfect and eternal, and He has entered the Holy of Holies in heaven, we now have unhindered access to the Father and are urged to come boldly to the throne of grace (Rom. 5:2; Heb. 4:16; 10:19-20). One hymn writes,

"Behold the throne of grace!  
The promise calls me near,

there Jesus shows a smiling face,  
and waits to answer prayer.  
That rich atoning blood,  
which sprinkled round we see,  
provides for those who come to God,  
an all prevailing plea.  
My soul ask what thou wilt,  
thou canst not be too bold;  
since his own blood for thee he spilt,  
what else can he withhold?"

So when we pray in Jesus name, this isn't some magic formula. It isn't just a prepositional phrase we must tack on to the ends of our prayers. It's a way of recognizing that when we are praying, *Jesus is our only qualification for access to the Father*. We're recognizing that as the God-Man, **He is the only Mediator between us and God** (1 Tim. 2:5). This is why it is absurd to pray to God in any name other than Jesus—be it our own or anyone else's. He is the only way. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Any other way is simply impossible.

It might help us understand what it means to pray in Jesus' name if we think about how difficult it would be to have access to the president of the United States in his oval office. He has such a full and guarded schedule that only people who merit his time and attention are allowed in. They must have credentials or accomplishments or some power base to see him. Or, they have to know somebody who does. Well, our somebody is Christ with those credentials. We are in Him.

This is extremely applicable too because many Christians get hung up in their prayer life because they know God is holy and that they are not. Sometimes we sin and we don't feel like we can come to God to even confess our sins. The guilt and shame are too much. The answer to that issue is that we don't come to Him in *our* name or *our* righteousness or *our* feelings; we come in *Jesus'* name and *Jesus'* righteousness and the basis of our union with Him.<sup>1</sup> We come to a loving Father, invoking Jesus' authority and His power.<sup>2</sup> Our prayers are acceptable and effective because they are in His name.<sup>3</sup> So we don't fear. We come freely in Him with a warm welcome. Lewis Sperry Chafer said if we could just "*catch one brief vision of the glory, majesty, and holiness of God, from that time forth that one would marvel that any human being...could have access to God; yet, through Christ as Mediator, sinners are provided with an open door into the presence of God.*"<sup>4</sup> We approach a throne of grace and not judgment because God's wrath is satisfied in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

## II. THE SPIRIT'S INVOLVMENT IN PRAYER. (John 16:7; Romans 8)

The ministry of the Spirit is essential for prayer. Jesus says to the disciples in **John 16:7**, "*It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.*" The Spirit is our Helper. And He helps with prayer too!

### 1. Access.

Jesus purchased our salvation, but we are in Christ and become sons, or children, of God through the Spirit's work applying salvation to our lives. He baptizes us into Christ, thus becoming the adopted children of God. **Ephesians 2:18** says, "*For through Him [Jesus] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*" This is a neat verse. All three members of the Trinity are mentioned in their expected roles and the Spirit is said to give access into this spiritual realm of God to commune with Him. **Romans 8:15-16** says, "*For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.*" **Galatians 4:4-6** basically says the same thing—that with the Spirit in us, we become children of God and become aware that we are. We have the Spirit of His Son, so like Jesus, we want to cry out "*Abba! Father!*" as well. And we can! His door is always open to us and we can climb onto His lap and shares our hearts as He listens attentively.

## 2. Ability.

**Romans 8:26-27** says, "*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; 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.*" This is in the context of a discussion on our future glory. The point is that until glory we suffer, groaning and longing for the redemption of our bodies. Sometimes the longing is so intense that we don't even know what to say or how to pray, but He draws us to pray and enables us to. He teaches us to pray (John 14:26; 16:12-15). He prompts us to pray. He guides and directs our prayers. But I also understand it to mean He takes our groanings and communicates them to the Father for us. He gives voice to our groans, interceding for us. He also prays for us when we don't know what to pray. This takes place automatically without our awareness of it. It's similar to Christ's intercessory prayer work on our behalf (Rom. 8:34). So that's how we pray by the Spirit: He gives us access and ability.

### **We pray by and in the Spirit.**

But Paul also says to pray "*in the Spirit at all times*" (Eph. 6:18) which I understand to mean "*in harmony with the Spirit's desires.*" We are walking with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) and yielding to Him—not quenching or grieving the Spirit in sin or sinful prayers (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Jas. 4:3). We have the mind of the Spirit when we pray. We are praying what is true and of God.

So a powerful prayer life, then, is connected with all three Persons of the Trinity. Because all three are involved in prayer, some Christians started praying "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Many who go to traditional churches say that before they pray and do the ritualistic sign of the cross with it, touching the head and chest and shoulders. That didn't develop until centuries after Christ. The earliest record of praying while making a sign of the cross is from Tertullian at the end of the second century and he noted that some people would make the sign of the cross on their forehead only. I assure you there is no biblical mandate for the sign of the cross and that God is not more or less inclined to answer our prayers because of the sign of the cross of

the words we say before or after we pray. Because it often has mystical, superstitious element with it, and because it's not the most Scriptural, many of the Reformers quit doing it.

My recommendation is that we that we pray as biblically as possible, which means we pray to the Father, through the Son (in the name of Jesus), by and in the Holy Spirit. That doesn't necessarily mean we always have to pray to the Father and add the "in Jesus' name" tag on the end. There's no reason to be that inflexible. God doesn't answer our prayers because we follow some formal code. However, most of the time you will catch me praying "to the Father in Jesus' name" out loud because it's a clearly defined way in Scripture. However, sometimes we might just pray to the "Lord" or "God" generally, keeping those Father, Son, and Spirit elements in mind without stating them. Charles Feinberg wrote an excellent article on prayer in relation to the Godhead in which he said, *"To say that one has prayed in the name of Christ is tantamount to stating that the prayer has been to the Father in the power of the Spirit; to say that prayer has been offered in the power of the Spirit is claiming that it has been to the Father through the name of the Son. So closely is prayer related to the three Persons of the Godhead."*<sup>6</sup>

So as we pray this week, let's remember that we have a heavenly Father that loves us. We are welcome through Jesus, our Mediator. And we pray by and in the Spirit. The Spirit, in particular, reminds us there's no need to be giants in prayer. We can come to God as children, sometimes not even knowing how or what to pray. And that's okay because true intimacy with God comes through honesty and authenticity.<sup>7</sup>

### **Prayer is about communing with God.**

That's really what prayer's all about: developing an intimate communion with God through adoration, confession, thanksgivings, supplications, etc. And *how incredible* to think that when we pray, we're brought into the intimate fellowship of the Triune God. I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but God didn't create us because He needed a loving and joyful relationship. It has always existed within the Godhead. He created us because *He wants to bring us into that fellowship*. The picture that comes to mind is Revelation 3:20 where Jesus is knocking on our door, wanting to dine with us. *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me."* We were made to dine with Him. To fellowship with Him. To connect with Him. To deny prayer is to deny the fundamental reason for our existence. It's to try and operate without being plugged in.

That's the attitude we ought to have towards prayer. It's a necessity. Instead, we're often like the captain of a ship who, in a storm, knew his ship was sinking fast. So he called out to his crew, *"Does anyone here know how to pray?"* One man boldly stepped forward. *"Aye, captain, I know how to pray!"* *"Good,"* said the captain, *"You stay and pray while the rest of us put on life jackets – we're one short."* That's funny but it does make a point: prayer should be more than a last resort. It should be a priority. Often, we don't pray until we're in trouble or there's a malfunction... until the ship of our life is sinking. But the good news is that even if you have neglected prayer and the ship is sinking, we can pray. He still wants us to call out to Him for salvation and restoration. Call on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin and He will save you.

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<sup>1</sup> John Walvoord, "Prayer in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 91 (1934), 466, said, "The basis of our prayer life ... is our union with Christ."

<sup>2</sup> Charles Feinberg, "Prayer in Relation to the Godhead," *BSac* 96, 295-296, wrote that, "To pray in the name of Christ means to invoke all of His authority and power. It includes all that Christ is and has done or ever will do.... To invoke the name of Christ is to avail one's self of all that He is in His essential character. Whatever God will do for Christ because of who He is, God will do for us when we ask in Christ's name. When we pray in Christ's name, furthermore, we must be certain that we have His mind and are in sympathy with His purposes and plans.... To pray in Christ's name is not to use His name as a charm or talisman simply, as though the bare repetition of it were all that is required to open the treasures of infinite grace. The name of Christ stands for Christ Himself. And to pray in the name of Christ is to pray in Christ, in the mind and spirit and will of Christ. Finally, we pray in the name of Christ when we are in intimate and vital union with Him."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1948, 1976), 3:258.

<sup>5</sup> Feinberg, *Godhead*, 290.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Reeves, *Enjoy Your Prayer Life* (England: 10Publishing, 2014), 37.