

American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to pray. You work 50 to 60 hours a week and then you're used to being entertained: TV, internet (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest), games (Temple Run), and all of this at your finger tips on your cell phones at any given moment. For most of us, the first thing we do in the morning and the last thing we do at night involves checking our phones. Who's tempted to take a peak at your phone right now? In fact, many of you are probably even using your phones right now to read the Bible. Have you ever thought: "I'm just too busy to pray? I don't have time to pray!"

Another reason prayer is so hard is because we prize intellect, competency, and wealth. If you have all of those things, you don't need God. Does prayer feel useless, as if you are wasting your time? You start praying and you get 15 seconds in when you're overwhelmed with everything you've got to do that day. Every bone in your body screams, "Stop praying; get to work!" "Our trust in ourselves and in our talents makes us structurally independent of God" (Miller, *A Praying Life*, 16).

I can relate with every single one of these pressures as I face them daily. At the same time, cultivating the discipline of prayer is one of the most foundational means of grace that God uses to bring about gospel renewal individually and corporately in the church. Will you use this sermon as an opportunity to honestly reflect on your current rhythm of prayer, or lack of prayer and ask God to ignite right desires and attitudes toward prayer? **Let's pray.**

Two weeks ago, Tanner laid out a framework called, "Dependent discipline." He said that we need both dependence on God and a disciplined life in order to grow in God's grace to maturity in Christ. We see these two complementary truths clearly here in Ephesians 6:10-20, the concluding passage of the entire letter on how they should live the Christian life and "walk in a manner worthy of the calling of the gospel" (Eph. 4:1).

Dependence: "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might" (6:10).

- Present passive: this is an outside power and should be a habitual and continuous practice.
- "Your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace" (Bridges).
- One of Satan's greatest tactics is to convince you that you don't need God. If he can keep you self-sufficient, you'll be useless for the kingdom. But you do need God. This war is a spiritual war and the forces of evil must be fought with supernatural power (6:12).
- If you are going to live the Christian life in the power of God, you must kill self-sufficiency.

Discipline: Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand... (6:11).

- Belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit, praying...
- Prayer is foundational for the deployment of the entire armor of God and yet Satan wants you to believe that prayer is a waste of time. Many of us have bought into his lie. "If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life" (Miller, *A Praying Life*, 49).

I. Dependency is the Heartbeat of Prayer (6:10-17)

- Self sufficient people don't pray. If you don't, "be strong in the Lord," you will not "pray at all times in the Spirit." Paul Miller says that "A needy heart is a praying heart. Dependency is the heartbeat of prayer" (*A Praying Life*, 24).
- Until you can wholeheartedly say and believe, "Apart from you, Jesus, I can do nothing" (John 15:5) you won't pray as you should. God, open our eyes afresh to see our neediness before you.
- Not only does dependency drive you to prayer, prayer drives you to dependency. Time in prayer makes you more dependent on God because you have less time to get other things done. Every minute spent in prayer is one less minute you could've spent doing something else. Prayer then becomes a means of grace to drive your heart and soul in utter dependence on God.
- How would you rate your dependence on God?

II. Cultivate the Rhythm of Prayer as a Discipline of Life.

If you're going to cultivate prayer as a rhythm of grace in your life, you need to know what this rhythm should look like. We're going to look at some specific characteristics of prayer that we can seek to cultivate, principles from Ephesians 6:18-20 but also from a variety of passages. I want us to start by reflecting on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9 where Jesus said, "Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

1. Pray Reverently

- How can sinful man approach a holy God in the first place? If you are going to approach a holy God in prayer, you've got to have an advocate, someone who will go in your place. This is why Jesus tells us to pray in his name:

"Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14; also 16:23).

- We need to practice the title of Bryan Chappell's book on prayer: *Praying Backwards: Transform Your Prayer Life by Beginning in Jesus' Name*. Prayer is only possible because of Jesus.

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:19-22).

- Jesus' life, death and resurrection pave the way not only for our sins to be forgiven but so that we might enter into relationship with God. Praying in Jesus' name recognizes that God only hears and accepts us through the work of Christ. You don't need to go through a priest or anyone else to access God. Jesus is your way to God. Pray in his name.
- You need to get this: prayer is not something you do in order to please God and be accepted by God. You couldn't pray long enough and consistently enough to make God accept you. You need to come to God, recognizing his holiness and the provision in Christ and pray, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13) and God will forgive you (1 John 1:9). Until you become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, you can't pray, "My Father in heaven."
- God's holiness drives us to ADORATION and CONFESSION.

2. Pray Relationally

- "Our Father...": Prayer is all about a relationship. Prayer is simply the medium through which we experience and connect with God. Prayer is not the end goal. Knowing God is. Just as in any other relationship, you don't need to pretend to be someone you aren't.
- Some of you think you've got to clean yourself up in order to pray to God. Prayer mirrors the gospel: You don't clean up act to become a Christian and you don't clean up your act to pray. "Jesus isn't just the Savior of my soul. He's also the Savior of my prayers" (Miller, 135). "God looks at the adequacy of his Son and delights in our sloppy, meandering prayers" (Miller, 55).
- So where do you start when you come to God in prayer? Start with what's real. Share your weariness, your wandering mind, your job struggles, family struggles, financial problems, your mess. Just tell God what's on your mind.
- Praying relationally is like catching up with good friends. Last weekend, Leigh and I traveled to NC to participate in Seth and Michelle's wedding. We spent a night with college friends (Wes and Katie Haney) We lingered together on the couch with snacks talking for hours. We had no particular agenda; we were simply enjoying each other. Listening, talking, reminiscing, laughing. We didn't plan the conversation. We bounced from subject to subject and it had a kind of fun, meandering, and play-like quality. We weren't focused on communication or words. We simply shared our lives with each other. Why would our prayer with God be any different?

- A caution about prayer systems acronyms: Systems can become rote and desensitizing us to God as a person. For example, try having an ACTS conversation with your wife: Adore her for two minutes, then confess your failure in taking out the trash, then thank her for cooking dinner and then hand her your list and requests for the evening.

3. Pray Biblically

- Listen to these promises of Jesus: “If you ask me anything...I will do it” (John 14:13). “...ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father...he will give it to you...Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23-24).
- How do these verses make you feel? Let me address two dangers in our praying found in James 4:2-3: “You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”
 - First danger: You don’t ask at all (If God is sovereign, why pray? What good does it do? Prayer doesn’t make much of a difference. I don’t need God!).
 - Second danger: You ask selfishly (God is a virtual ATM and we ask for more comforts).
- A Complementary and Balanced Approach:
 - God is absolutely sovereign and he is a prayer-hearing and answering God. You must learn how to act on these simultaneous truths without elevating one and diminishing the other. If your theology leads you away from prayer, something is wrong with your theology. The Bible insists that we pray and gives us examples of God answering prayer (go read Daniel 9-10).
 - Because God is sovereign and because he longs to give good things to his children, I can ask and he will listen and act. Prayer fills your life with possibility. You dream again.
- Ask boldly, surrender completely:
 - Jesus’ prayer on the cross: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36; see Dan. 3:17-18).
 - Praying “Your kingdom come, your will be done” requires us surrendering our will to God. This is actually a scary prayer. You’re saying, “King Jesus, come rule my life.” This is what Jesus is getting at in John 15:7: “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
 - Connect your praying with Bible reading – pray God’s Word and you will pray his will.

4. Pray Exhaustively

- So far, we’ve talked about the manner in which we should pray. But, what should we pray for?
- “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication...making supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18). “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God” (Phil. 4:6). “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Prov. 3:5-6).
- “It is nothing less than self idolatry to conceive that we can carry on even the ordinary matters of the day without his counsel...Be in the habit of going to him in the first place—before self-will, self-pleasing, self-wisdom, human friends, convenience, expediency. Before any of these have been consulted go to God at once. Consider no circumstances too clear to need his direction. In all thy ways, small as well as great; in all thy concerns, personal or relative, temporal or eternal, let him be supreme.” (Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs*, 24–25).
- Are you letting God reign supreme in every aspect of your life? There should be nothing that is off limits to take to God in prayer: college choice, potential boyfriend/girlfriend, car, house, vacation, job, etc. We normally talk to everyone but God in these decisions. We tend to talk to God about spiritual things and leave the rest up to the experts. Everything decision, every word, every action in life has spiritual significance.

- At the same time, I want to make a distinction between what C. John Miller calls Maintenance Prayer and Frontline Prayer.
 - Maintenance prayer is focused primarily on physical needs, all needs that one day will pass away when Jesus returns (jobs, homes, sickness, death).
 - Frontline prayer involves eternal matters: confession of sin, the flourishing of the church and reaching of the lost, a yearning to know God and see his glory. Learn to pray this way by imitating the prayers of Scripture (Paul, the Psalms), reading prayers of dead saints (Valley of Vision), and by praying with others.
 - We need to make sure that we aren't just praying maintenance prayer – we need balance.
- A Few Practical Suggestions (make prayer cards/lists: name, short phrases, Scripture; use technology with care):
 - Pray for Yourself (confession, repentance, daily tasks, big dreams).
 - Pray for Others (Family, Co-workers and Classmates, Neighbors, Friends)
 - Christians
 - Non-Christians (Movement Cards)
 - Pray for Your Church
 - Leadership
 - Church's Vision and Goals (2013 Vision)
 - Community Group
 - Missionaries/Church Planters (Operation World)
 - Pray for Cultural Issues
 - Orphan Care (Daybreak, Foster Care, Adoption)
 - Elected Officials
- When I pray specifically for people, it also fuels my engagement with them when I see them.

5. Pray Continually and Persistently.

- When should I pray? What should this rhythm look like?
- “Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18; also Col.4:2); “be constant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12); “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17-18).
- This is how Paul described most of his prayers, “First, I thank my God...for all of you...that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers” (Rom. 1:9-10).
- Continually: Charles Spurgeon said, “I always feel it well to put a few words of prayer between everything I do.” Describe a day of continual prayer (morning, kid's awake, morning work, lunch appt., afternoon work, Stop and Shop, Gas Station, return home).
 - The very act of pausing in a busy day to pray weakens pride and fosters dependency on God. Weariness is often the result of pride and self-sufficiency (C. J. Mahaney).
- Persistently: this is the way little children act. They ask repeatedly. Over and over and over again. They wear us out. God wants you to come persistently, needy and dependent upon him.
 - In Luke 18, Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow so that “they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (18:1).

6. Pray Systematically.

- Don't let continual prayer be an excuse for not developing a rhythm of strategic, focused prayer. How great would your relationship be with your spouse if you only talked in snippets to each other through the day and never had focused times of conversation?
- “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matt. 6:6).
- Nothing fuels continual prayer better than systematic and consistent prayer. This is a matter of prioritizing your life. If prayer is really a means of grace in producing godliness in me and

impacting the kingdom, and if I really can't do anything a part from Christ, then I've got to prioritize prayer. For some of you, to cultivate this rhythm is going to involve an adjustment of your schedule. Get to bed. Get up early (eliminates distractions: emails, texts, TV, kids). Keep going. This is easier than you think. Can you make a 6:13am flight? Yes, because of what's at stake (money, missing an important occasion).

- If I told you that if you woke up 30 days in a row an hour early and that one of those days you would get an idea that made you \$5,000, would you get up early?
- Would you get up early if it helped your marriage last forever?
- Would you get up early if I promised you'd grow in your faith?
- We sacrifice for and prioritize things that have a large enough reward.
- Set an alarm, get out of the bedroom, turn all the lights on, drink a cup of coffee, get comfortable. Will you commit to pray five minutes a day for 21 days (3 weeks)?
- Cultivate not only individual prayer, but collective prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:23-31).
 - Don't use personal prayer to keep Christian community distant. You can't isolate prayer from the community of believers because many times God uses other to answer prayers in your life. You should ask others the same questions you ask God.
 - Pray with your wife, your kids, on Sunday Mornings at Church, in Community Groups, in Discipling Relationships, at First Friday Prayer Gathering

Dependency is the Heartbeat of Prayer:

- Dependency is the heartbeat of prayer.
- Pray reverently in Jesus' name.
- Pray relationally with authenticity.
- Pray biblically by asking boldly, and surrendering completely.
- Pray exhaustively by letting God reign supreme in all things.
- Praying continually and persistently throughout your day.
- Pray systematically, individually each day and regularly with others.

Dream with me: what might God do through Redemption Hill Church and Greater Boston if we collectively cultivated prayer as a more consistent rhythm in our lives and starting asking God boldly for his will to be done as we completely surrendered our lives to it. America is one of the hardest places in the world to pray and I know you're too busy to pray, but there's no greater time and place than today in Boston for God's people to prioritize prayer and you are too busy not to pray. Will you be a part of a movement of God? What today can you ask God boldly for?