

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH**

**SUNDAY, JULY 18, 2021**

**SERMON: PRAYER ESSENTIALS: LEARNING FROM THE DISCIPLES**

**TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9**

There was a cartoon that pictured a little boy kneeling beside his bed to say his bedtime prayers and he seemed a bit disgruntled. As he is talking to God he says, "Aunt Harriet isn't married, Uncle Hubert hasn't found a job, and Daddy's hair is still falling out! I am getting tired of praying for this family without getting any results!"

It is amazing what you can learn by observing and talking to children. One of my children once told me they wanted a job like mine because I only work Sundays and all I do is stand up and go "blah, blah, blah!"

We continue on with our "prayer essentials" and if the Old Testament gives us the foundations for prayer and our prime example is how Jesus prayed, then logically we look to see how, after being taught by the Master, the disciples prayed and prayer in the New Testament.

Let's begin with our scripture lesson today found in Philippians 4:4-9:

**<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

**<sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or**

**seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.**

In general, we have one word that we use when we talk about prayer or praying, and they are those words exactly, “prayer, pray, praying, prayed.” But in the ancient Greek language during the time of Jesus and beyond, there were multiple words used, each with a different connotation, and often words that were common in everyday speech.

Some of the Greek terms are about general prayer as we know it while other every day vocabulary relates to how we “communicate” with God or with the people around us. Again, the words used in Greek were not specifically or deeply religious.

If you do a study of prayer in the New Testament you will see a great deal of time on what is called “petitionary prayer” or asking (“petitioning”) God for something personal or on behalf of someone. Where we falter at times, is when our prayers turn so inward focus that we start praying selfish prayers. I spent my high school years living in southern Indiana. I new people who went to a decent sized Christian school that was started by a large Baptist church in the area. The church tended to be on the more “charismatic” side. My friends who attended played on the basketball team and were told basically that God or the angels would help them win by putting the ball through the hoop. My question always was, “What if someone on the other team was praying to God for the victory as well?”

Petitionary prayer is absolutely important. It is good, and right, and proper to uphold those around us (and even those we don’t know) in prayer and ask for God’s intervention. In the New Testament it is easy to see that petitioning God had its roots in a desire to see God’s will done. When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, he told them to pray (Mt. 6:10):

**<sup>10</sup> May your Kingdom come soon.  
May your will be done on earth,  
as it is in heaven.**

Petitionary prayer wants to see prayers answered (or not answered) so that God's kingdom can advance and grow until such time as Jesus returns. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane represents petitionary prayer (Mt. 26):

**<sup>39</sup> He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."**

In the same passage Jesus also continued His prayer:

**<sup>42</sup> Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done."**

It is important to separate our will from the will of God. Many times people have stated to me that they didn't know "why" God hadn't answered their prayers only to realize that an unanswered prayer generally reflected the fact that God seemingly did not give them what they wanted.

It is wonderful to realize that we can boldly approach God's throne with our petitions because of two great promises of God that have been answered. The first is the fact of the resurrection of Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit. These two fulfilled promises encourage the gathered body of believers – the Church – to boldly petition our Heavenly Father to continue working His will in our personal lives, our corporate lives, and the lives of all humankind. The New Testament church, their hope came from their petition to, as Paul stated in Philippians 3:10-11:

**<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, <sup>11</sup> so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!**

May our prayer life always lead us to the feet of Jesus and desire to see those around us encounter our living Lord!

## SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Do you struggle in your prayer life? Do you find it hard to know what to pray, how to pray, or possibly how to organize your thoughts as you pray? I want to suggest a systematic prayer method, that I have preached on before, called the ACTS method.

ACTS stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

### ADORATION

As you begin, stop and acknowledge who God really is! His greatness, His love, His grace, His mercy. Praise God for who He is! A wonderful example of this is the prayer found in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, a prayer of David before the people:

**Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name.**

When was the last time you sang praises to God during your prayer life? Modern Christian chorus or great Hymn of the Faith – sing your praises to God as part of your prayer life.

## CONFESSION

When we acknowledge who God really is, a natural follow-up is to be struck with the reality of who we really are. The next step in prayer leads us to confess to God our shortcoming and be open and honest to Him for our failures and fears. During this time ask that God to show you the actions and attitudes in your life that need to change. Ask God to take away the barriers that keep you from having a closer relationship. Are you scared to be absolutely honest and specific about who you are with God? You shouldn't be! The reality is you aren't keeping anything secret from the God who is all-knowing and knew you before the beginning of time. Also we remember the promises of scripture in 1 John 1:8-9:

**<sup>8</sup> If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. <sup>9</sup> But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.**

You could also model your confession on David's plea to God after he sinned with Bathsheba. His plea to God in Psalm 51:10-13:

**- Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

## THANKSGIVING

The hymn we often sings tells us to ***"count our blessing, name them one by one."*** This is our next step. James 1:17 reminds us that:

**17 Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens.**

Taking time to thank God for all the blessings he has given us helps keep things in focus. It is too easy to push God aside when we fall into the trap of thinking somehow our blessings have come because we are clever, talented, and good at what we do. All of those characteristics are gifts and talents that God has given us to make the most of our lives. Take time to thank God for the blessings you have (and yes! BE SPECIFIC). We must also remember that the first thing we should be thankful for is not friends, family, jobs, things that we have attained...but first be thankful for your salvation that has been given to you. Paul reminds us:

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18--Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

#### SUPPLICATION

Now is the time to boldly come before the throne and ask God for assistance, guidance, wisdom, healing...all the things that weigh us down or that we see are the needs of those around us. This is the petitionary prayer that we just talked about. Paul teaches Timothy about petitionary prayer when he writes:

**I Timothy 2: 1-4--First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

May we take the example of the early church, as they put Jesus' teachings and examples into practice, to examine our prayer life. Perhaps one of the first things we need to confess to God is the fact that we don't really have a prayer life outside of asking a blessing for a meal or bowing our heads when others pray. May we find a new, vital relationship with Jesus as we focus on how we communicate with Him. May the Holy Spirit encourage us and strengthen us as we pray in a more meaningful way.

Let's pray...