Ways of Faith 5-Prayer

Unity Church August 10, 2025

Psalm 91 Romans 8:22-28

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ?

My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends.

Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends,

So Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz ?

Oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV ?

Dialing For Dollars is trying to find me.

I wait for delivery each day until three,

So oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV ?

Sometimes, the best way to make a point is to show what we shouldn’t be doing. Last week we looked at spending daily time alone in the scriptures. Today I’d like to look at prayer and the act of praying. As I said last week, preachers love to point out what we should be doing without telling us how to do it.

I doubt that Janis Joplin was making a theological statement with her song, Mercedes, from the late ‘60s. She was more likely poking fun at the faithful. Recalling some of the TV and Radio evangelists from that era and today, her satiric barbs are not that far off the mark. Sadly there are preachers who teach this idea of a relationship with God and more sadly, people who believe it.

I’m surprised, even dumbfounded when people say, “I don’t know why God hasn’t answered my prayers, I’ve been a good person all my life.” Some seem to look at God as a cosmic ATM machine and prayer as the spiritual equivalent of telling the machine what you want and which account to take it from. This may be overstating the reality, but there are believers who tend to think of prayer and their relationship with God as similar to someone sitting on Santa’s knee and rattling off a Christmas list. “Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz?”

1

That’s not quite what I had in mind when talking about prayer being one of the three legs of the stool of our personal relationship with God. Prayer and the act of praying, accomplishes some amazing things in our lives. It readjusts our focus, it puts us in a right standing with God and, I would argue, is more about others than ourselves. To explore this further, let’s look at a paradigm or prototype of a method of praying.

I don’t know who first came up with this teaching on prayer, I’ve heard it from about 5 different places, but in looking at praying or a prayer that is given, spoken, whatever, it should have 4 parts. Acclamation, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Think of the 5th book of the New Testament. ACTS: Acclamation, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. If we look at the Lord’s Prayer, we see each one of these, but not in this order.

Put into plain words: Lord, you are wonderful. Lord, I have screwed up. Lord, thank you for loving me. Lord, help us. Applying this to the Lord’s Prayer, we have: Acclamation: “Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed or blessed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it already is in heaven.” Supplication: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Confession: “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.” Supplication: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” Thanksgiving, which in this prayer looks a lot like Acclamation: “For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen,” or, “So be it.”

If one does a search of the words “praise” and “Lord,” they will find them used together 173 times in the NIV. If you search “praise” and “God,” you’ll add another 101 citations. These are either statements, “I will praise the Lord,” “I will praise the God of my salvation,” or they are admonishments, orders, to “praise the Lord,” “Come praise our God with me.”

This acclamation or praise is part of how prayer readjusts our focus. As I said in the sermons on gratitude, one doesn’t praise the Lord without recognizing or recalling the many reasons why we should offer Him our praise: His faithfulness, His love, His salvation, His provision. One can’t go through this exercise without doing the accompanying thought process of why we are praising him.

2

To my mind, this is one of the benefits of the discipline or practice of prayer, it causes us to look at the many wonderful things that our heavenly Father has provided for us.

Confession. There again, refocusing ourselves. The scriptures are full of verses which tell us that if we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive. The Psalmist says, “A broken and contrite heart, thou will in no way cast out.” In one sense, this is also part of acclamation. We confess our sins to God, because we recognize that He is the only one who can and does pardon sin. He is the only one who loved us so much, that while we were living in sin and darkness, sent his Son to die for our sinfulness. You can take that a step further: 2000 years before we were born into sin, He paid for our sinfulness. He built the way back to Himself.

Thanksgiving. This can at times look an awful lot like Acclamation, although I think one is a statement of wonder and awe, the other is a statement of gratitude. Both work toward refocusing us as believers. One is saying, “Our God is an awesome God,” the other is saying, “Thank you for being an awesome God!” “Thank you for how you are awesome in my life and the lives of others!” The mindset that brings us to thanksgiving is the recognition in our own lives of how blessed we truly are and have been. What may start out as generic thankfulness will ultimately bring to light the many specific things that we have to be thankful for.

My siblings tell me that they hated when I got to say grace as a kid. It seems that I would go way beyond blessing food. I was thankful for birds, flowers, kittens, sunshine, etc. My sister says it was case of “Say, ‘Amen’ already, we’re hungry!”

Which leads us to Supplication. Webster defines it as, “asking for something earnestly or humbly.” I have talked about how the act of praying refocuses us.

I would argue that after we have gone through the thought process and spiritual act of acclaiming the wonderful attributes of God, confessed that we have missed the mark, while recognizing the forgiveness and restoration He provides for us, and have thanked and praised Him for what he is and what he does for us and in us daily, at that point, we are ready to ask of Him what we will.

3

In going through this refocusing, if you will, we find that what we supplicate, ask for, will change. In other words, what we are looking at, what we are focused on is different from where we started. It’s not all about me, it’s not “I want, I want, I need, I need.” Without realizing it, in going through this process, we find ourselves in the “JOY” paradigm that we learned in Sunday School years ago, “Jesus, Others, You.”

Our attitude that was all about me and what I want is inverted, turned on it’s head. After I have spent time recounting the wonders of our God, confessed my own humanness and frailty, thanked God for his unending love, His Son Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, I realize that me having a Mercedes Benz is not all that important. Granted, it would be nice, but I’m truly thankful for my Nissan Rogue that faithfully gets me where I need to be. In changing my way of looking, I don’t need a $60 or 70,000 car because I’m not defined by what I own. I am defined by the Father who I just spent all this time acclaiming and thanking.

We find ourselves in a place where our supplication, our asking is redirected. It is not about me so much as about those around me, the faces and situations that the Holy Spirit quietly brings to the front of my mind while I’m praying. You know, those situations that my mother used to refer to as mess, mess, mess! Those seemingly impossible circumstances and straits which only human beings can seem to get into.

In learning to pray this way, over a period of time we recognize that the entire body of believers has been strengthened, not only because you are praying this way, but so am I and so is the person next to you. Hopefully we all get to a point where we are praying for each other. As we individually get deeper into this prayer walk, this faith walk, we get stronger corporately, healthier, closer together as a family of believers.

As we get deeper in our personal praying we learn another important lesson: God does answer prayer. Seriously, stop a second, most people say that they believe God answers prayer, but in the back of their mind, they have their doubts. It goes something like, “Well, yea, but....” We say we believe in answered prayer, but we wouldn’t bet the farm on it. Another way of putting it is given the choice between depending on prayer or a federal government program, we’d pray, but still fill out the paperwork. 4

All of us have been around the block enough times. We’ve seen the charlatans, the faith healers, the “give a God a dollar and He’ll bless you” sort of thing. Most of us have a healthy sense of skepticism, born of either experience or wisdom, and, God forgive us, but we wouldn’t necessarily bet the farm on God answering prayer.

I’m not asking you to bet the farm, I’m not even asking you to choose between Spiritual healing and going to the doctor. I can tell you that God answers prayer, and you can look at me and say, “Okay, whatever!” The only proof I have that God answers prayer is in my own life and I will admit, those answers have not shown themselves as some sort of earth shattering miracle, but they have shown themselves just the same.

The miracles that I have witnessed in my life have been slow moving ones, things that have taken a while to transpire. The love and forgiveness of a father towards a son, the restoration of broken sibling relationships, the miracle of a relentless call, pursuit by our heavenly father on a cocky, rebellious, smart aleck - a quiet intentional miracle of Him patiently and repeatedly saying, “I love you, I have always loved you, and I will always love you!”

I have learned through these quiet, slow moving miracles the truth in two pieces of scripture: James  5:16, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective,” and Psalm 51:17, “A broken and contrite heart you will in no way cast out.”

Try this, I promise you will find a loving, caring, comforting God who will meet you there, and you will look back and find yourself saying, “Wow, He does answer prayer.” 5

Psalm 91 NRSV

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

For he will deliver you from the snare of the hunter and from the deadly pestilence; he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and defense.

You will not fear the terror of the night nor the arrow that flies by day nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

James  5:16,

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective,”