

“Transforming Prayer: How Everything Changes When We Seek The Face of God”

II Thessalonians 1:11-12

~ Delivered at DHBC on September 8, 2013 (Soli Deo Gloria)

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to II Thessalonians 1. **READ 3-12.**
- In one sense, learning to pray is the easiest thing in the world. Prayer is nothing more than the child of God opening his or her mouth to speak with God our Father. And just like any good father, God is deeply pleased when his children speak to him.
 - At 2 years old Josh is just starting to speak. This summer he would call me by saying, “Dadada.” The extra syllable is obviously incorrect but I don’t care. It thrills my heart. Likewise, God delights in hearing his children cry out to Him in childlike faith saying, “Abba, Father.”
- But God also wants his children to mature in their relationship with Him. For a 2 year old Josh is doing great. But if, many years from now, Josh is heading off to UBC and the only words he can say to me are “Dadada” I will assume there is a serious problem.
 - This is what happens to many of us in prayer. We haven’t matured. We’re still toddlers. We know how to thank God at meals, pray for sick people, request safe travel, and seek help in finding a parking spot but that is about the extent of it. We don’t know how to commune with him for 30 minutes let alone an hour. We may even go days without praying to Him.
 - If we are honest, we are not sure how to pray to God or what words to use when speaking to Him. We who can speak so effortlessly to people suddenly find ourselves unsure of what to say to God. We echo the words of Paul in Romans 8 when he says, ***“For we don’t even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray.”***¹
- Speaking personally, I do have set times of prayer and have enjoyed many wonderful times of communion with God. But if I am honest, I often find prayer a struggle. If I am honest, I am usually less satisfied with my prayer life than with any other part of my Christian life.
 - It is deeply encouraging to me then to hear some of the great Christians of centuries past speak of their difficulties in prayer. Listen to this quote from John Bunyan. He lived in the 17th century and is the author of that famous book *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. He spent time in jail for preaching and is known as one of the great heroes of the faith. Yet he writes this:
 - ***“May I speak of my own experience, and from that tell you the difficulty of Praying to God as I ought. It is enough to make [some people] entertain bad thoughts of me. As for my heart, when I go to pray, I find it so reluctant to go to God, and when my heart is with him, so disinclined to stay with him, that many times I am forced in my prayers; first to beg God that he would***

¹ Romans 8:26 (New Living Translation).

*take mine heart, and set it on himself in Christ, and when it is there, that he would keep it there.*²

- So in light of all of this I want to begin a 6-part series entitled, **“Transforming Prayer: How everything changes when we seek God’s face.”** If, like me, you feel a deep need to mature in prayer then this series is for you. Oh that we would see ourselves, this church, and this community transformed as we seek God’s face.
 - To do this we are going to look at six prayers from the apostle Paul. Most people think of Paul as a great theologian, evangelist, and missionary. He certainly was each of these. But I am convinced that it was because he was preeminently a man of prayer.
 - So today we will see four ways to transform our prayer lives from this prayer that Paul makes for the Thessalonian Christians.

ORIENTING YOUR LIFE AROUND THE WORLD TO COME

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First then, transform your prayer life by orienting your life around the world to come.
 - Before we get to the content of Paul’s prayer in verse 11, notice carefully those few words at the beginning. **READ 11a** – **“With this in mind...”** So there is something on Paul’s mind that guides and directs his prayer. What is it? Well it is what he has just been talking about in verses 3-10. Paul’s mind is awestruck by that future day when Jesus will return.
- Paul is here trying to encourage these Thessalonian Christians to keep persevering in their faith despite the persecutions they are facing.
 - It is then Paul launches into a breathtaking description of what will happen at the return of Jesus. This is one of those passages that makes my soul tremble and soar with joy. It is terrifying and beautiful. Horrifying and captivating. We learn two things about that day.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, it teaches us that for believers there will be vindication at the return of Christ. Look at verse 6. **READ 6** – **“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.”** When Paul? When will God make things right? Keep reading.
 - **READ 7** - **“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”** And look down at verse 10. **READ 10** – **“on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.”**
- Oh what a glorious picture of the future. This is what I long for beyond anything else. A day is coming when the sky will light up like fire. The armies of heaven will surround this planet. And He will be revealed. When Jesus’ people see Him the text says we will glorify Him and marvel at Him.
 - Our family did a lot of marveling this summer as we explored the Big Island of Hawaii. We said **“wow”** and **“whoa.”** Every few minutes it was, **“Wow, look at that.”** When Jesus returns we will marvel. **“Look at Him. I had no idea He was so glorious.”** I can only imagine what that moment will be like,

² John Bunyan, *I Will Pray With the Spirit*. (Language has been updated)

- ***“Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for You Jesus or in awe of You be still? Will I stand in Your presence or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all?”***
- On that day God’s people will be vindicated. No longer will people laugh at us, mock us, imprison and kill us, for He will bring relief.
 - Our son Tyler who is 6 was telling me about a time at school last year when his friend said to him, ***“I don’t believe in God.” “So what did you say to him?”*** Tyler looked at me with deep conviction. ***“I said one day Jesus is coming back to create a new heavens and a new earth and on that he will prove to you that he is real.”*** Vindication.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** In the second place, this passage also teaches that for unbelievers there will be retribution at the return of Christ. Oh let your soul tremble under these words in verses 8-9.
 - **READ 8-9** - ***“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”***
 - Those who do not know God *are* those who refuse to obey the gospel of Jesus. They refuse to admit they are sinners or that they need Jesus to save them. They are those who say to their Creator, ***“I will live for myself.”*** And so they ignore and disobey the very one who gives them life and breath and everything else.
- For unbelievers that day will be terrifying. You see like any good King, God is patient with this planet that is in rebellion against Him. But his patience and offer of pardon will only last so long. Like any just and good king He will eventually punish rebels and remove them from his planet.
 - My heart can hardly bear the weight of those next words. ***“Everlasting destruction.”*** And even worse, ***“Shut out from the presence of the Lord.”*** Hell is not a place where people party, laugh, and enjoy themselves. All laughter, fun, and enjoyment are gifts from God. But unbelievers are shut out from God. In short, those who reject God will for all eternity be rejected by God.
 - I cannot go any further before asking you if you have obeyed the gospel, the good news, of Jesus. The gospel commands you to admit your sins, to bow the knee to Jesus, and seek his pardon that you might be given eternal life. The offer of mercy still stands this hour. Don’t wait for it to expire.
- But now we need to bring all of this back to prayer. When, like Paul, you orient your life around the world to come it changes the way you pray. It changes the way you pray about the here and now.
 - ***“Father please heal her of her sickness but more than that Lord I pray that you would use this sickness to draw her to yourself.”*** When your life is oriented around the world to come you get really serious about praying for things you often neglect, like world missions. ***“Father, we pray for Raj and Kim, our missionaries. Provide for their support that the great nation of India may hear more about you.”*** You start caring about the persecuted church, ***“Father, bring relief to our brothers and***

sister around the world who are in jail or are being persecuted or even killed for their faith.” Your prayers move beyond your family, ***“Father, bring salvation to people on the Westside. Pour out your Spirit. Empower your preachers. Use us Lord to bring your good news to many. May we see many people embrace your Son and be saved.”***

- You see when you orient your life around the world to come it makes you care more about the present. It makes you see the present through eyes that care for more than just health, wealth, and happiness. If you want to transform your prayer life then orient your life around the world to come. Read passages like this. Meditate on the return of Christ. Orient your life around the world to come.

PLAN TO PRAY

- But let us now hurry along to the second point. This one will be quick. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, transform your prayer life by planning to pray.
 - Look again at verse 11. **READ 11** – ***“With this in mind we constantly pray for you.”*** Note that this great man of prayer does not pray occasionally or haphazardly. He is constantly in prayer for them.
 - DA Carson writes these wise words: ***“We do not drift into spiritual life; we do not drift into disciplined prayer. We will not grow in prayer unless we plan to pray. That means we must self consciously set aside time to do nothing but pray.”***³
- Carson is right that at a most basic level we do not pray simply because we do not plan time to pray. Life is busy and so we must plan. It may look different for each person. Some people find it far more effective to wake up early in the morning. I am not a morning person but it is the only way I can be consistent. Others prefer the evening.
 - If you have no disciplined time of prayer I want to encourage you to begin today. Start small. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Set aside 15 minutes at the same time every day. Spend the first half in reading the Bible and the second half in prayer. You may have to be creative. Maybe you can use a portion of your lunch hour. Maybe you have to work around kid’s naptimes.
 - Husbands, lead your families in this. Find 10 minutes a day to worship with your family. With the age of our kids we find it best to do this just before they all go to bed. So dads, gather the family. Read a portion of Scripture and choose just one thing to pray about. Again, you must plan or it will not happen.
- When you are at prayer you will need a method for prayer. Many people enjoy using the ACTS acrostic. A stands for adoration. Take time to adore God for who He is. C stands for confession. Confess your sins. T stands for thanksgiving. Thank him for the many gifts in your life. And S stands for supplication. Supplication means requests. Bring your requests and needs before him. So that is the second point. Transform your prayer life by planning to pray.
 - We are now ready to get into what we actually pray about. These first two points are more of the framework for prayer. But when we actually pray

³ DA Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, pg 19.

what do we pray about? Really the answer is anything. Just as no child's request to his or her father is too small so we should bring everything to God. But as we mature in life and in prayer we learn that some requests should take priority.

PRIORITIZE YOUR REQUESTS

- So in the third place we will say this: **(SHOW SLIDE)** transform your prayer life by prioritizing your requests.
 - So many of our requests are focused around health, comfort, and financial blessings in this life. Again, I emphasize that much of this is right and good. In 3 John 2, John prays for his friend Gaius saying, ***"I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you."***
 - But he does not end there. He adds, ***"even as your soul is getting along well."*** John cared about Gaius' physical well being but he cared even more about his soul. We see the same thing in Paul. Paul makes two requests.
- First, we see from how Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that growing in prayer means **(SHOW SLIDE)** asking for Christian maturity. **READ 11** – ***"With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling."***
 - Now let's be clear on what Paul is saying and what He is not saying. Paul is not praying that they would live such good lives that they would be worthy for God to call them to his kingdom. No. We don't earn God's calling. Salvation is a gift. They are already Christians. They have already been called. Paul is praying that they would live up to that calling. Since they are citizens of God's kingdom, he is praying that God would enable them to live in a way that reflects this reality.
- So you see when your mind is oriented around the world to come you don't just pray for other people's physical health or their need for work - as important as those are. Your ultimate concern is where they stand with God. Once they become Christians your ultimate concern is that they live in a manner that pleases him. You care about their health but most of all you care about their soul.
 - This is clearly one of Paul's highest priorities. He prays for the Colossians that ***"you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way."*** To the Ephesians he says, ***"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*** This is clearly one of Paul's highest priorities for believers.
- Is your own walk with God one of the chief things you pray about? Is the holiness of other believers a principal concern in your prayers? Parents how do you pray for your children? By all means pray for their exams, for good jobs, and for a good relationship with them but, above all, pray that they might know Christ and live lives worthy of the calling they have received.
 - I echo the thoughts of one author who recounts how we often ask someone how their kids are doing and they say something like, ***"Oh, Johnny is doing really well. He is the best player on his soccer team. Jane was asked to take a new position in her company which also doubles her salary."*** ***"Great,"*** you say and then ask, ***"And how are they doing***

We have started Crown Street Kids Club to meet this need for after school care in our community. Father, fulfill this act by empowering our director Adina and all her staff.”

- ***“Father, we want to obey you and make disciples. We stepped out in faith the idea of hiring Kajle to oversee this GROW program. By your power enable Kajle to lead well. By your power draw people into GROW that they might mature as disciples.”***
 - Pray for fruitfulness in your life and the lives of others. This verse invites you to dream about how you can serve Jesus with your unique gifts and abilities. Dream. And then act on those dreams all the while praying that God, by His power, would ***“fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.”***
 - Prioritize your requests.

RECALL THE GOAL OF PRAYER

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Transform your prayer life by recalling the goal of all prayer. Look at verse 12.
 - **READ 12** – ***“We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him.”***
- This is the end goal of all things. Not that our mature lives, our ideas, and our actions would make us look great. No! The goal of all prayer requests is that people might praise, worship, adore Jesus – that he might be famous and honoured as he deserves. When this goal is before your eyes you will always pray rightly. Think about all the things you prayed for this past week. Why did you pray for them? Was your prayer controlled by an earnest desire to see Jesus glorified or was it so your life would be better?
 - So we don’t pray, ***“Lord get me out of this situation.”*** We pray, ***“Father, please deliver me but whatever you happens enable me to glorify you.”*** We don’t just pray for healing we pray that someone would be healed that they and others might give praise to the gracious God who healed them.
 - And Paul says that we will also be glorified in Jesus. The day is coming when all those who suffer dishonour for following Jesus will be publicly honoured. What a gracious Saviour. He let his people join in his glory.

CONCLUSION

- Do you want to transform your prayer life? This week begin by planning to pray. Orient your life around the world to come by meditating on the reality of heaven and hell. Come in prayer seeking the glory of Jesus. This will transform your requests. You will cry out for Christian maturity for yourself and others. And you will cry out for fruitfulness in purpose and plans of your life and the lives of others.
 - So what is your plan for prayer? What time of the day will it be? Where will you do it? Let’s begin this week transforming our prayer lives.