

Prayer is...Devotion
March 10th / Daniel Hickenbotham

INTRODUCTION

- The last few weeks we have been trying to get a better picture of the ins-n-outs of biblical prayer.
 - We have gone from some broad foundational issues regarding the “why” of prayer to the more specific “what’s” and “how’s” of prayer.
 - We have been approaching the study of prayer as systematic theologians, pulling out and examining certain aspects of prayer, like individual gems we are trying to gauge the worth of.
 - However, this isn’t a giant checklist we are assembling, so that we can either feel good or feel guilty depending upon whether we have or have not effectively touched upon every one of these aspects in every one of our prayers.
 - That is a danger when taking a systematic approach to something as fundamentally relational as prayer.
 - We can turn it into a formula to try and manipulate God, or even worse, we can turn it into a burdensome obligation that no one can possibly do well enough.
- The goal of this series is to explore good biblical parameters for prayer, so that we can grow in it, not be hobbled by it.
 - For some of us, that means we can broaden the boundary lines where we have imposed some unbiblical limitations on prayer.
 - For some of us, that means we can recognize we may have stepped over a boundary and have been calling something prayer, that may very well not be biblical prayer.
 - For some of us, that means we actually start praying...
- So today we are going to see that **Prayer is Devotion**, but before we get started will you pray with me:
 - “Lord God... We as your people are as much in need of your Grace in this moment as we were in the moment that you saved us... and you have and are saving us and we LOVE you because of that. We thank you that in your kindness you reached out to us, convicted us, and drew our hearts and affections to Jesus. Father, we ask that by your Spirit our hearts will be enlightened to Your Word, our soul would be convicted and encouraged, and our love for and commitment to your Son would deepen. Amen”
- Open to the Book of Acts, chapter two, and read with me verse 42.
 - **Acts 2:42**
“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.”
 - Remember this is the little fledgling church in... this spirit birthed and spirit filled church was characterized by these four things.
 - So let’s look at this concept of being devoted...
- So the word Devotions for my family, and I think for much of the Christianese speaking world, was interchangeable with the phrase Quiet Time.
 - In my house, “Have you had your devotions today?” Meant, “Have you read your bible, alone somewhere, and possibly prayed?”
- Here in Acts, this term devoted, means to adhere steadfastly to, be committed to, to move constantly towards... and he uses it twice... they devoted devoted themselves to these things...

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- Some of your translations will likely say, they “continually devoted” themselves to prayer...
 - So we know they were all in on this stuff... But what does that look like in the day to day...
 - This morning we are going to look at the prayer life of David, a man who the Spirit of God came powerfully upon, revealed through the Psalms, and at the prayer life of Jesus, to get a picture of what spirit filled devotion in prayer can look like...
- SO... The first thing that stands out to me in looking through the Psalms is how enamored David is with God...
 - He sees the Lord as surpassingly wonderful, and overflows about it both to God and to others!
- In much of his writings we see that:
 - **Devotion is Affection**
 - I have used the term affection here for the sake of brevity... but throughout the Psalms you can see that there is a delight in, an adoration of, and an admiration for the Lord pouring out of the heart of David.
 - It surpasses mere fondness, it is in addition to the deep reverence and awe he has for God... David has deep affection for the Lord.
 - His affection isn't rooted in his own natural passions, as much as his affections are impassioned by the nature of God...
 - He expresses this well in Psalm 116
 - **Psalm 116:1-2**
“I love the Lord because He has heard my appeal for mercy. Because He has turned His ear to me, I will call out to Him as long as I live.”
 - David loves God. He is affectionate towards God and he is giving EXPRESSION to that affection.
 - In this case He is expressing it through song, which we know is not unusual for him, or for us...
 - Christians sing their affection towards God... And Christians pray their affection towards God.
 - And we see ALL throughout the Psalms, David was free in his expression of deep reverence, but also deep affection, admiration, and adoration of God.
 - In the New Testament, we see it in the flashes of spontaneous praise in the writings of Paul, where he just burst forth in adoration of God...
 - But we also see that ***Jesus prays to God with affection...***
 - Throughout the Gospels, Jesus prayed regularly to God as FATHER... Jeff taught is that was a term of deep intimacy and affection...
 - And he instructed us to pray the same way...
 - Then in John 14-17, we see this prayerful picture of Jesus loving the disciples, disciples loving Jesus, the Father loving the disciples, Jesus loving the Father, the Father loving Jesus, etc...
 - It culminates in Jesus asking that the love that exists between the Father and the Son would exist in us... both between you and I and between us and God...
 - I have to imagine that is an affectionate, expressive love that exists between the members of the trinity...
 - And throughout church history, heroes of the faith, some who left us their prayers in journals and autobiographies, have carried in their hearts that deep affection for God.
 - Maybe you are like me and you struggle with prayer... BUT LET ME ASK YOU:

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- When you look at the things you love, the things you are affectionate towards... the things you admire... the things you adore... Does Christ have a seat at that table? THE SEAT at that table?
 - We go after what we are affectionate towards... what our hearts are captivated with...
 - Personally, I know I could spend less time watching reruns of Parks and Rec, and more time mining the word for treasures and stealing away to be with the Lord in prayer.
 - Because these two facets of devotion are intertwined: it is the revelation of God to us that will stir the affections within us...
- **Devotion is Recognition**
 - We all here know that there is something fundamentally WORTHWHILE about growing in the knowledge of God, or it is unlikely that we would spend our Sundays gathered here...
 - Some of us had a Damascus Road experience, where we were knocked flat and came to know that God is and that everything is different because of that... and we want to know more...
 - Some of us had the crockpot conversion... we spent a lot of time in and around the things of God, and one day we realized... oh... I'm done... I believe... I want to know more!
 - Some of us had some combination of the two... a few of us here wonder if God is worth knowing...
 - But we all, to be called born again believers, have to come to identify that God is Holy and worthy of our entire lives, and because of that Holiness, Sin is a Big Deal... and because Sin is a Big Deal, we need a REAL Savior... and that Christ is that Savior, and that he has called all to repent and believe..
 - And the next step after that realization is what? We pray and recognize it back to God...
 - But the more we begin to see, to recognize, the worth of God and the wonderful things He has done for us, the more we are inclined to devote ourselves to seeking Him in prayer.
 - And not just because we feel affectionately, but because we recognize the value of pursuing Him even when we don't feel like it...
 - Sometimes the feelings, follow the facts... sometimes our hearts follow our feet...
 - Look at what David does here in Psalm 103
 - **Psalm 103:1-5**
"My soul, praise Yahweh, and all that is within me, praise His holy name. My soul, praise the Lord, and do not forget all His benefits. He forgives all your sin; He heals all your diseases. He redeems your life from the Pit; He crowns you with faithful love and compassion. He satisfies you with goodness; your youth is renewed like the eagle..."
 - He is RALLYING His soul to praise, to lift the voice of His spirit to the Lord, by laying before his eyes the wonderful works that God has done on his behalf!
 - Later in that Psalm he starts to recount, not just what God has done, but who He is...
 - He is practicing recognition in order to stir his affections and devotion...

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- Jesus's does this when welcoming back the 70 he sent out... he prays, affectionately as to a Father, giving thanks for the way God is revealing the Kingdom to people... and recognizing it is because of the Father's nature and will...
 - It's a spontaneous, affectionate, prayer in which He recognizes what God is doing back to God.
- Recognition is kind of like confession in that God already knows... it is not like He is confused about how amazing He is... but in any relationship, recognition is a beneficial thing...
 - (Insufficient Example) WIFE EXAMPLE
 - My wife is wonderful, but she is NOT GOD, so if SHE is deserving of verbalized, honoring recognition, how INFINITELY MORE deserving is our wonderful God!
 - But its not just beneficial to my wife to hear it... it is beneficial to ME as a husband to verbalize it!
 - Husbands, the more you complain about your wife, the more you will find to complain about... Wives, the more you talk about your husband as another one of your children, the more childish he will seem to you...
 - But the more you speak in an honoring fashion to or about her, the more honorable she will seem... the more you speak respectfully to or about your husband the more respectable he will seem.
 - The more we confess or proclaim the true things about God in praise and in prayer, the more our hearts will grasp and align with the truth of who God is... it will stir our affections...
 - And this Recognition holds hands with the next facet of Devotion...
- **Devotion is Repetition**
 - God has created us as creatures of habit... of rhythm... repetition...
 - The creation account is written with Rhythm and Meter... with repetitive pattern...
 - It even says that God put the lights in the heavens to mark the passage of time WITHIN the pattern... the rhythm... the habit... of creation... we call them seasons...
 - Now our habits are prone to perversion due to the fall, but habit can be incredibly beneficial to us...
 - We use discipline... with increasing repetition... to create habit... or we indulge lack of discipline... with increasing repetition... to create bad habits...
 - BUT... We were CREATED like this... and the more we foster a habit, the more it becomes a necessity for our satisfaction...
 - The same goes for our spiritual habits... for our prayer life...
 - Look at what David says here in Psalm 63...

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- **Psalm 63:1-8**
“God, You are my God; I eagerly seek You. I thirst for You; my body faints for You in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water... You satisfy me as with rich food; my mouth will praise You with joyful lips. When I think of You as I lie on my bed, I meditate on You during the night watches because You are my helper; I will rejoice in the shadow of Your wings. I follow close to You; Your right hand holds on to me.
- David is analogizing this devoted seeking of God to our repetitious need for food and water... Thirst is the first symptom of water withdrawals... Hunger is the first symptom of calorie withdrawals...
 - David’s soul feels pangs for connection with God... he is in a sense feeling withdrawals...
 - That feeling comes from a regular, repetitive life of seeking the Lord in prayer, in worship, in study, in confession, etc...
- But it is not just repetition in the ACT of praying...
 - It is repetition in the CONTENT of prayers.
 - David is the primary contributor to the book of Psalms... His contributions are a written log of his devotional life.
 - AND DAVID REPEATS PHRASES AND THEMES AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD OVER AND OVER AND OVER THROUGHOUT.
- We see the same in the life and teachings of Jesus...
 - Luke 4 and 5 describes the start and early stages of Jesus public ministry... there is a flurry of supernatural activity and earthly drama being described
 - Right in the middle of it all is this almost random, single sentence in Luke 5:16...
 - “Yet, he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed.”
 - The pattern of Jesus’ life... THE MOST DEVOTED MAN WHO HAS EVER LIVED... the notable repetition of his life during this exciting time... was to go away from it all and pray.
 - It’s not just His life example either... it’s His EXPLICIT teaching...
 - Anyone remember the parable of the persistent widow?
 - <SUMMARIZE IT>
 - Luke 18:1 says this was a parable to teach them about THE NEED TO PRAY ALWAYS AND NOT GIVE UP
 - The woman said the same thing to the judge OVER and OVER and OVER...
 - Again, not vain repetition... intentional PERSISTENCE...
 - He equates this persistence... this discipline of repetition in both the action and content of prayer... with having faith...
- So we see that there is a disciplined persistence... a faith-filled repetition... which is a part of devotion in prayer... which feed into our final point...

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- **Devotion is Dedication**
 - Now dedication in English has a couple of different meanings.
 - The primary way we use it is to denote an ongoing commitment to something.
 - “Bro, if you want to have abs, you gotta be dedicated to eating right and hitting the gym... and buying my supplements... and using these essential oils...”
 - But there is another meaning, and we see it with ships, movies, and babies...
 - It is a setting apart of someone or something right from the beginning or at completion of something.
 - It is a setting a part of something for a purpose...
 - We see multiple times throughout the old testament this type of dedication...
 - Specifically with Solomon we see that this dedication is inaugurated in a prayer of devotion.
 - But David Embodies both types of dedication in
 - **Psalm 116:12-14**
“12 How can I repay the Lord for all the good He has done for me? I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of Yahweh. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people.”
 - David dedicates himself to responding to the Lord’s generosity and kindness by joyfully taking the cup of salvation, by calling upon the name of the Lord... entering into a redeemed relationship with God... and by fulfilling his vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people... i.e. setting himself apart to work of God, (he took vows), and then following through with ongoing commitment (fulfilling those vows).
 - In our devotional prayers we are to make VOWS to the Lord... to dedicate our lives and all that we are to Him as an expression of faithful TRUST in HIM...
 - Then we put ourselves to the task of fulfilling those vows in the presence of all His people.
 - AND... we confess and repent when we deviate from that dedication and then get back in the fight to fulfill those vows.
 - But when was the last time you got on your knees and prayed a prayer like that... that your life would be devoted, dedicated, set apart and sanctified, to the praise and glory of God?
 - Some of us have only ever done that in the moment we cried out for salvation.
 - Some of us didn’t even do it then!
 - THAT IS A TERRIFYING PRAYER TO PRAY BECAUSE THAT IS A PRAYER HE WILL ANSWER... And it doesn’t always look the way we want it to!
 - <Personal Example... IF THERE IS TIME>
 - Now listen, this is not a shame moment...

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- This is the call of Romans 12:1
“Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God... this is your true worship.”
 - This is scary Old Testament imagery... a sacrifice laid on an altar was WHOLLY DEDICATED to one thing...
 - So we initiate, and reiterate, and bind ourselves to that altar of dedication in our prayerful devotion!

CLOSING

- And in case you think this type of whole-hearted devotion in prayer, isn't available today:
 - That was only a back then thing...
 - Let me tell you about David Livingstone... (Missionary to Africa 1847-1873)
 - “Victory. He rested quietly on the 30th; but at four on the morning of May 1, 1873, the boy who slept at Livingstone's door wakened, beheld his master, and fearing death, called Susi. "By the candle still burning they saw him, not in bed; but kneeling at the bedside, with his head buried in his hands upon the pillow. The sad, yet not unexpected truth soon became evident; he had passed away on the furthest of all his journeys, and without a single attendant. But he had died in the act of prayer, -- prayer offered in that reverent attitude about which he was always so particular; commending his own spirit, with all his dear ones as he was wont, into the hands of his Savior; and commending Africa, his own dear Africa, with all her woes and sins and wrongs, to the Avenger of the oppressed and the Redeemer of the lost”
 - That is such a moving testimony of sacrificial, prayerful, devotion...
- But there is a still more moving testimony of sacrificial, prayerful devotion...
 - We see in the life of Christ an ongoing dedication in word and in deed to the will of God...
 - But in the Garden of Gethsemane... as the Lamb of God sweat blood and labored in prayer... we see this concept in Ultra High Definition...
 - Jesus, the eternally existing 2nd member of the trinity, the uncreated yet enfleshed Son of God, unabashedly asking the Father to do anything else than what is about to happen... unashamedly asking for the Cup the cup to pass from him... because this cup is not like the cup of Salvation that David spoke of taking earlier... this cup is the Cup of the Wrath of God...
 - But then we see Him DEDICATING HIMSELF TO DRINKING IT DOWN, setting Himself apart to be crushed beneath the weight of the just punishment for sin, with the simple phrase: “not my will, but yours, be done.”
 - That was the moment where Jesus laid Himself upon the altar... offered himself as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God...

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- And the Father accepted Him as the perfect sacrifice... and on the cross Jesus drank down all of that Cup that he dreaded so much... **SO THAT WE CAN OFFER OURSELVES... SO THAT WE CAN DEDICATE OURSELVES... SO THAT WE CAN LAY ON THE ALTAR AND NOT BE DESTROYED, BUT RATHER FIND LIFE THERE.**
 - Think about this... Jesus's dedication in prayer was so thorough, that 3 (potentially 4 depending upon who you think Jesus was speaking to) of the last 7 statements of Christ on the cross were prayers...

- Brothers and Sisters, this is a huge part of what the Christian life is... a devotion to prayer... prayers characterized by stirred affection, thoughtful recognition, faith-filled repetition, and steadfast dedication...
 - A life filled with prayers like "I offer myself to you Lord," "Against you alone have I sinned O Lord," "I thirst for you, my body faints for you in a land that is dry", or..... "I love you Lord..."
 - ... but mostly, truly devotional prayer, the prayer of the living sacrifice, will echo the heart of Christ's prayer in the Garden... "not my will, but yours be done..."