

Session Two: The Practice of Prayer

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion,
and to you shall vows be performed.
O you who hear prayer,
to you shall all flesh come.
When iniquities prevail against me,
you atone for our transgressions.
Blessed is the one you choose and bring near,
to dwell in your courts!
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
the holiness of your temple!
— Psalm 65:1–4

Heitland “Prayer is the *earnest*, verbal response of our souls to the inscrutable and living God.”

More on Prayer

The Heart’s Exercise

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Owen²⁰ All men will readily acknowledge that as without [prayer] there can be no religion at all, so the life and exercise of all religion does principally consist therein.

Prayer is the soul’s response to God

Prayer Times

Formal

Psalm 55:17 Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.

²⁰ John Owen, *The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in *The Complete Works of John Owen*, ed. Lee Gatiss and Shawn D. Wright, vol. 8. *The Holy Spirit—The Comforter*, ed. Andrews S. Ballitch (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 23.

Psalm 119:164 Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.

Daniel 6:10 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Spontaneous

Nehemiah 13:14 “Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.”

Common Struggles and Errors

Titles as commas

Bob . . . Bob . . . Bob

Mere “just”-es

Pseudo-modesty

Be ruthless

Trinity and prayer

To the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit

Gregory of Nazianzus²¹ No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.

²¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 40.xli. Available at: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310240.htm>.

Hyperbole

Hallesby “Prayer is the most important work in the kingdom of God.”²²

“You will begin to realize more and more that prayer is the most important things you do; and that you can use your time to no better advantage than to pray whenever you have an opportunity to do so, either alone or with others, while at work, while at rest, or while walking down the street. Anywhere!”²³

Sovereignty and Responsibility

Hallesby “Does God need our intercessory prayers?”

“We can answer by saying, in the first place, that it is impossible for God to bring the world forward to its goal without humankind. . . . God has voluntarily bound Himself to us in His government of the world. From the very beginning of history of revelation we see that God has established His kingdom only where He could find people who would voluntarily permit themselves to be used by Him. It thus becomes evident that God has voluntarily made Himself dependent upon our prayer.”²⁴

Spontaneous = Spiritual

Hallesby “As long as we think we will ‘get’ time to pray, we still do not know a great deal about our own carnal natures.”²⁵

“Unanswered” Prayers

2 Corinthians 12:7–10 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the

²² Hallesby, 70.

²³ Hallesby, 172.

²⁴ Hallesby, 156.

²⁵ Hallesby, 91.

power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Eclecticism

Mazes, Centering, and Mysticism, oh my!

2 Corinthians 11:3–4 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

The Role of Faith

Matthew 7:7–11 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Mark 11:20–25 As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered.” And Jesus answered them, “Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Application: The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:5–15 And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 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.

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.