

Today we're starting a four part series on the word pray. We're going to learn how we can pray with passion and power, so that we can deepen our intimacy with God.

First I have a question: How many of you would join me in saying, "I absolutely believe in the power of prayer and yet I probably don't pray as much as I should." Why is it that we know that we have a good God who answers the prayers of His children and yet so many of us don't pray as we know we should?

I think there are probably several reasons why. Some people honestly don't really know how to pray and lack confidence, wondering, "Am I doing it right?" Some people, some of you, may actually get bored while you're praying. I hate to actually admit this in public as a minister, but I've been known to fall asleep while I'm praying.

Yet, I'm also prone to lose focus very quickly. It's like, "Dear God, I just want to thank you for that shiny thing. I wonder what it is? How did it get there? I think I need coffee."

Another issue is when you're with people and their prayers seem great. They have great ideas and flow easily from one to another. They never repeat themselves and they can quote large sections of obscure books of the bible. You listen in and think, "If I was God I'd answer that prayer because that's a good prayer."

I want to start the series today with a couple of things we sometimes do that I think are mistakes. The first one is this: **Our prayers are often too small.** The second one is: **Our prayers are often too general.**

When we pray I sometimes think God must get a bit frustrated with the lack of faith that many of us have in what we pray for. For example, I think a lot of people pray like this. "God, thank you for this day. I pray you bless me or bless so-and-so." Sometimes I wonder if God isn't going, "Have you looked where you live, in the part of the world you're in. You're already blessed but ok," or we are like, "God, just be with us today." Again, God's like, "I've told you I'd never leave you or forsake you and you're asking for something I gave you already, again. "God, give us travelling mercies as we go today." God's like, "Okay, easy. Give me something big."

In other words, I wonder if God doesn't ever say, "Ask me for something that will help show off my glory when I answer it." Why is it we kind of undercut the power of a God who said, "With me all things are possible." I wonder if the lack of specificity and the breadth of possibility ever insults the heart of God. "I could do so much more if you would just have the faith to ask me."

Many of us, we pray very small and very general prayers. I am going to encourage you to pray big and specific prayers because *general prayers do not move God to specific actions*. General prayers do not move God to specific actions. James says that we do not have because we do not ask.

What I want to do is to ask God for very specific requests and have the faith to believe that He can do things that otherwise would be impossible to ever see. When all of a sudden we do see them then there's no one that could deny that that must have been by the hand of God, because it would have taken God to pull something like that off. I want to pray big, faith-filled, specific, and passionate prayers. In fact, I'll give an example of one such prayer. I love to read the prayers of others because they inspire me and teach me to pray even better.

This is a story about Martin Luther, who is the father of the reformation. He had a friend named Friedrich Myconius who was his assistant and kind of helped serve him as he was undergoing the enormous task of reforming the church in the 1500s. Well, in 1540 Myconius, his assistant, fell deathly ill and was on his death bed. He wrote a letter, a farewell letter, to Luther saying, "The end is near. I love you," and all this kind of stuff. Luther wouldn't stand for that and instead of praying a safe little, "May the Lord be with you and comfort you," and all, he prayed a massive, specific, faith-filled prayer and wrote this in a letter back to his friend, Myconius. This is what Luther wrote. He said this, "*I command you in the name of God to live because I still have need of you in the work of reforming the church. The Lord will never let me hear that you are dead, but will permit you to survive me. For this I am praying because I seek only to glorify the name of God.*" That is a big and specific prayer. What's even crazier is Myconius had already lost the ability to speak. He was evidently hours away from death, as they thought. When he heard this letter it engaged his faith and miraculously the guy was supernaturally healed. He lived six more years and guess when he died? Two months after Luther died. That's how specific the response was to a specific and faith-filled prayer by a man who had enough faith to believe that all things are possible with God.

Cat picture

I want us to learn to pray this way to tap into the power of God. What we're going to do over the next four weeks is this, we're going to look at four different texts that Paul, the apostle Paul, wrote. If you don't know, Paul used to be Saul. He was a guy that persecuted Christians, killed Christians, hated Christians. He had an encounter with Jesus and was completely transformed, and so he would start churches and kind of build them up and then go start more churches. Then he would write letters to them. He wrote a big portion of the New Testament. We are going to be looking in what's known as the Pauline epistles.

When Paul wrote his letters he wrote prayers in them. He would say, "I pray," and then he would write what he was praying for. Then you'll see again and again he'll say, "***I pray _____ (blank) so that,***" and then he gives the reason why he's praying. Over and over and over again when Paul prays you'll see him, "I pray for this so that this would happen." We're going to learn and pray for the very things he prayed for and we're going to learn to be inspired by God to pray on purpose. "God, for this very reason I ask you to do this so that this will happen in the world."

The first prayer we're going to look at is found in Ephesians, chapter 3. Paul wrote this prayer around the year 60 A.D. from a Roman prison to the churches in Ephesus, and he started his prayer this way. Ephesians, chapter 3:14-15 *For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* When you pray it's important to

know you can pray in any posture you feel comfortable praying. You can pray standing. You can pray sitting. You can pray laying down. You can pray while you're driving – just keep your eyes open.

In this particular case Paul decided to kneel before God in prayer. I would encourage you just to vary the postures. I do this all the time. Based on the intent, the heart and the need of the prayer. For example, when I kneel before God there is something in me that just says, "God, I am giving you due reverence. In other words I'm worshipping you. I'm acknowledging my weakness. I'm acknowledging your strength and kneeling is a great way to do this. It's a way to show reverence. I also, whenever there's something I'm really petitioning God for, I like to kneel. It helps me to focus and it's a very valuable way to do it. You might try a different position this week as you're praying. He says, "For this reason I kneel before my Father.

Ephesians 3:16 *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,* Out of his glorious riches. When Paul is praying he is recognizing that his Heavenly Father has every spiritual blessing in Heavenly Realms available to His children. I am praying to a gloriously rich God. I pray that out of his glorious riches. Earlier in Ephesians 1:3 Paul had said this. He said, "*I thank my God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing from the Heavenly Realms.*" He was saying, "God has already made available to us every possible spiritual blessing in the Heavenly Realms. This is the God to whom I pray."

"I pray that God out of His glorious riches" ... Paul said in Philippians 4:19, he said that, "*My God will meet all of your needs according to his glorious riches.*" We serve an infinitely spiritually-rich Heavenly Father and yet so many of us are living like spiritually-impooverished children. We serve a God who has every spiritual blessing available to us in Heavenly Realms. He desires to give those blessings to us and we're often praying small and general prayers.

You ask specific, Faith-filled prayers and God delights in blessing His children with every spiritual blessing from the Heavenly Realms. Paul says, "I pray that out of His glorious riches that He may do," what? he may strengthen you with power! Power that comes through the Spirit in our inner being. Now, why did He pray that?

Ephesians 3:17 *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.* This is the first of the pattern, 'so that'. He says, "I pray that God may strengthen you with power." The Greek word translated as power is the word *dunamis*. We get our word dynamite from this word. It means the explosive, miraculous power of God. It's not like human power. It's the power of God. I pray that He may strengthen you with *dunamis*, with supernatural power. It's available to you.

Paul says, "I pray that out of his glorious riches that my God would strengthen you with *dunamis*," with dynamite. It's available to us and yet so many of us are not tapping into what is available to us.

We need to realise that there's more power available to us through the Holy Spirit out of the glorious riches of God, if we will call on it, if we will ask Him for it. Paul says, "I pray," not that you'll be blessed and saved but that you'll have power so that the presence of Christ may dwell within your heart.

In verse 17 he continues. *"I pray that you being rooted and established in love." If you want your roots planted in anything make it the love of Jesus, "that you being rooted and established in love may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*

Now why do you need power to know how much He loves you? Because you need to know that this love surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. If any of you ever look at someone and you think, "Why do they have something that I don't have spiritually? Why is it that they seem to have a peace that I don't have? Why is it they seem to have an assurance? Why do they seem to have something that I don't have?" The answer might be because they have something that you don't have. They have all that God has available to them and this comes from a supernatural understanding of the love of God.

This is what's crazy. You cannot naturally understand God's love. It must be supernaturally revealed. Our finite minds do not have the capacity on our own to comprehend just how much God loves us.

That's why, spouses, one of the best things you can pray for your spouse is that he or she would have the power to understand how much God loves them. Then, they will be drawn intimately into a loving relationship with God and be totally transformed and this knowledge is not something that is naturally understood. It has to be supernaturally revealed. That's why any time I try to talk about the love of God I fail miserably. I do not have the vocabulary, nobody does, to do His love justice.

With God love is not what He does. Love is who He is. It's the essence of our God. God is love. God is love. It's not just what He does. It's who He is. When you recognize that's who He is, then you stand from the strength of, "There's nothing I can do to cause Him to love me more, and there's nothing I can do to cause Him to love me less. He doesn't love me because of what I do. He loves me because of who He is."

When that overtakes me, suddenly Christianity is not a something I do on Sunday. It's the essence of who I'm called to be. I am a Christ follower. I have power that dwells within me so that Christ lives in my inner being. Suddenly I'm not living for the lower things of this world or focusing on myself.

One of the most important prayers you can pray for those you love, that they may have power to understand just how much God loves them. In fact, someone asked the famous trumpeter, Louis Armstrong, one time to explain jazz. "Louis, tell us about jazz. Can you explain jazz to us?"

You know what Louis said, he said, "If you got to explain it, you ain't got it." Okay. If you got to explain it, you ain't got it. If you have to try to explain the love of God it could be that you haven't been immersed in it. You haven't been overcome by it.

In fact, I really pray that many of you would really have deeper and more meaningful spiritual encounters with the holy God, that it wouldn't be just I'm singing a song at church but I'm dwelling in the presence of God. I'm hearing His voice. His Spirit is guiding me. When I'm reading His Word it's as if it's jumping off the page giving me encouragement or convicting me away from my sins, or it's leading me into the right places. I'm having the faith to do things it would seem impossible otherwise.

It's a little bit like Charles Finney who was a famous evangelist in the 1800s. He was a follower of Jesus but then he had a deeper encounter with God. Here's how he described it. He said this, "The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul, and I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity going through and through me. Indeed, it seemed to come," and here's the part I want you to notice. He said, "It seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love." "Waves and waves of liquid love, for I could not express it any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God." It came in waves and waves of liquid love. To me this is a beautiful image of the love of God.

I pray, I really do, that you have power, supernatural power, to understand how much God loves you and that it would be like waves ... Just when you think you understand it, more comes, and just when you think you sort of understand ..., more comes. Waves and waves and waves of love. Then one day things start to change in your life because maybe for years you've been dissatisfied. You have so much and yet you want so much more. For years maybe you've battled with depression or feelings of loneliness or inadequacy. Suddenly those things start to melt away. Why? Because the power of God is dwelling within you.

The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead takes up residency inside of you. Your identity is not based on what you have or what you do but on what God thinks about you, and there is a deep assurance of His love because it's not been naturally learned but supernaturally revealed. Therefore, you are never the same. Guess what, your prayers change when you know how much God loves you and when His power dwells within you your prayers aren't, "Keep us safe today, God, and bless this food and be with us and, yeah, that's all I can think of. Amen."

You're praying for big things, big things. "Oh, God. Oh, God, I pray for my husband who's really irritating. Make him less of a pain, if you can." No. "Touch the heart of my husband, God. I pray that he would bow his knees in full surrender to your Son, Jesus, and He would stand up a fully devoted follower of Jesus, a man after God's own heart, that our family would be different because he leads us to the things of God and He is close to Jesus, hearing from His Word. That generations would be different because my husband will fully belong to you."

You pray big prayers. You pray specific prayers. You believe in a God who says, "All things are possible with me." Then your faith grows and it grows and it grows, because you have the

power of the risen Christ dwelling within you. Let me show how Paul wraps this thing up. He basically says, "That you may be full ... the full measure of all God has for you."

In verse 20, it's almost like an anthem. He says, '*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine*, In other words, you cannot even measure how much He's able to do. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. The greatest thing you can picture in your mind, our God can do more. The greatest thing you can dream up, our God, He can do more. According to His what? *according to his power that is at work within us*,

Within us. Within you. That's where His power is. You are not on your own. When you are weak His power's made perfect in you. *²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen*'

To Him be glory in the church. The church that he loves. The bride of Christ.

Do you see the faith in this prayer? This isn't, "God, help us through the day. Help us through the week." This is empower us to do your work, for your glory. Some of you know what that's like. Some of you have experienced the power of God in circumstances and situations that seemed impossible. Wouldn't it be great though if all of us knew that power working in our lives. What difference would there be if we began to pray big prayers and expected God to move in power?