

“HOW DO I PRAY FOR MYSELF?”
by Rom A. Pegram (1/12/20)

One of the most common questions I receive about prayer is this: Is it okay for me to pray for myself? And then most go on to tell me, even before I answer, that that would be selfish, so probably ‘no!’

I want you to think about something, as we begin our time in God’s word today. Think about your relationship with a close friend (hoping everyone has at least one). I think it’s safe to say that you have to have a balance when you’re in conversation with a good friend—not always talking about yourself, but talking about their point of view on topics, their feelings, their perceptions about important things. BUT, it’s also okay to talk about yourself in those relationships, isn’t it? I mean, if you’re feeling down about something, or have a deep concern about something, aren’t those the things you’d prefer to talk to a good friend about—you know, someone you can trust?

That’s my answer to the question ... *is it okay to pray for yourself?* Because, what is prayer again (from last week)? Prayer is: COMMUNICATION WITH GOD—one who loves us more than any other ever could! So, if God loves us that much, and we’re walking closely with God in our lives, as long as we keep a good balance in prayer—not *always* talking about ourselves, don’t you think God would want to hear our hearts?

Folks, I’m going to point us—for the rest of our time together—to God’s word. We’re going to go to the Master Teacher, the Son of God, Jesus ... to learn how to pray. In Luke 11:1, in conversation with his disciples, here’s what happened: “Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, ‘Lord, teach us to pray....’” I’m so glad Jesus’ disciples asked him that, because I need all the help I can get, especially when it comes to praying for myself...

I’ll never forget, when I was a student at Asbury College, I’d probably worked an 8-hour shift the evening before, hadn’t got enough rest, hadn’t been able to study enough ... and now I was going to a classroom to take a big test. This seemed to happen too often, but there I was, sweating bullets again...

I get to the classroom, look over my notes, and bow my head (I wasn’t the only one). And I would pray ... ‘God help me! I know I haven’t studied enough, I haven’t slept enough, but if you’ll just help me through this one test ... I’ll promise to...’ ‘Anyone ever been there before?’

So, here’s my question: What do you think God thinks of that kind of prayer? ‘Probably not the best example of a good, well-balanced prayer, but I know this: GOD ACTUALLY LIKES THOSE KIND OF PRAYERS! God approves of that kind of prayers. *God wants you to come to him with every need in your life!* Again, that’s probably not the best example of a balanced prayer, but folks ... *it is okay to pray for yourself!* As a matter of fact, if you’re a believer, God promises to answer your prayers. King David, in Psalm 138:3, writes this: “As soon as I pray, you answer me; you encourage me by giving me strength.” God wants us to pray for ourselves. But the question we’re going to ask today is: *How should I pray in a way that ensures God hears and answers my prayers?* Here are 5 important truths when praying for yourself. When praying for myself, I must...

KNOW THAT GOD IS FOR ME. When praying for myself, I must know that God is for me! If you want your life to have maximum impact/fulfillment, you need to be able to approach God, knowing that God loves you and wants to give you good things! So, when you pray, pray in a way that expects nothing less than God's very best!

In Matthew 7 (9-11), Jesus explains it this way: "You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? ¹⁰ Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! ¹¹ So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him."

You need to know today that God is not a cosmic killjoy! God is our Heavenly Father who loves us dearly. He wants to give us good things. He wants to bless our lives. Unfortunately, some of us have had bad experiences with earthly fathers and that's tainted our view of God, too! But I'll promise you, GOD IS DIFFERENT. GOD IS FOR YOU! God is your biggest fan. God's in your corner. He's your biggest supporter. God loves you so much, he wants to be by your side. But that doesn't mean everything in life is going to be easy...

One of the greatest defeats of my life came during my short-lived wrestling career. The reason I went out for wrestling was because I really liked the coach. We seemed to have a connection, so I wanted to wrestle for this guy. There'd been no history of wrestling in my family or anything. This was something new—something I just wanted to try out for myself.

One of the first tournaments I got to wrestle at was a home tournament, which meant many I knew were there for the show. Folks, I got beat ... and beat good. Little did I know, the person I was to wrestle had been a state champion in the past—very, very skilled. I didn't know what hit me (*like going up against Jared Neill!*). I felt so defeated afterward, like I'd let my team down, my school down, and my family down.

When I got home, word had already got to my parents about my defeat. My parents both acted like nothing had happened that day. And they didn't treat me like a loser. They were going to love me anyway. Life was going to go on. There was no judgment in my home, simply because I'd lost a wrestling match. As a matter of fact, they both put their arms around me and told me how proud they were of me! They would have been on my side—no matter what! And, folks, *it's the same with God...* Turn to the person beside you and tell them 'God is for you.' Do that right now, would you?

If you don't believe God's on your side, it's going to be really hard to pray. But once you believe God is, you can go to #2. When praying for yourself, you must...

ASK BOLDLY (3 Ways). Make the 'big ask!' You must ASK... If we're honest, when we pray, many times, we pray reluctantly. Maybe we're afraid to ask because our request just isn't important enough to bother God with. Or maybe we think God doesn't care. Or God's so far away, he's not going to bother with us. So, we don't pray boldly; instead, we pray tentatively/reluctantly...

But the Bible tells us repeatedly that if we're followers of Jesus, *we should pray boldly*—expecting God to answer us. Jesus reminds us (John 14:13), “You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it....” What an incredible verse! Only 13 words, but they carry tremendous power! The key is ... you must ask! If we don't ask, God doesn't step in and intervene in our lives. We've got to ... make 'the big ask!' (Note: If God gave you everything you wanted or desire before you ask or despite the fact you don't ask, how would you ever know that the good things that come into your life are from God?) Make 'the big ask,' then...

Pray in Jesus' name. 'Who should I pray to?' Should I pray to God the Father? Should I pray to Jesus? Should I pray to the Holy Spirit? The Virgin Mary? Who should I pray to? Have you ever asked that?

Well, Jesus tells us who we should pray to—modeling it in his prayers. *We're to pray to God the Father, in Jesus' name!* So, do you have to use those exact words? No. It's not the use of magical words when you pray—specific words. What Jesus really means by 'praying in his name' is this: *We recognize that we are only able to pray to God because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross*—making it possible to have this kind of relationship with God... Pray in Jesus' name! Finally, when it come to asking boldly...

Have confidence God is going to answer. Here's Matthew 21:21-22: Then Jesus told them, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. ²²You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it.” Believe God will answer your prayer! Next...

SUBMIT TO GOD'S WILL. We talked about this last week, so we don't need to spend a lot of time on this one; it's the third petition of the Lord's Prayer—*your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!* We must submit our will ... to his; God's will has to come first! So, *how does this work in my prayer life?* When I pray and ask God for something, always praying as Jesus did—for God's will to come first, God answers our prayers in one of four ways: He either says ... NO, SLOW, GROW, or GO.

The truth is our prayers won't always be answered the way we think they should be. Why is that? Because sometimes God has something better in store for us that what we'd thought of...

If you're a parent/grandparent, you know this is true. Sometimes a child'll ask for something that you know isn't in their best interest. And because you really love that child, you sometimes have to say 'no.' And you say 'no' not because you *don't* love the child, but because you do—wanting what's best for your young one in every situation...

And it's the same with God. We have to trust him, because God knows more than we do. He sees what we don't. He knows what's best for our lives, and he love us. So, confidently submit to God's will ... and you'll know his very best! Then...

BE PERSISTENT. One of the biggest mistakes we make when we pray is ... we give up way too soon! But Jesus tells us one of the keys to our prayers being answered is coming back to God and asking God for something over, and over, and over again (Matt. 7:7-8): “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ⁸For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

It's called persistence. Jesus shares in Luke 11 (5-8) about a guy who goes to a friend's house at midnight. He wants to borrow 3 loaves of bread; he's had unexpected guests and has nothing to feed them. So, he knocks on his friend's door and says 'Hey, can you help me? I need some bread. Can you give me some bread?' And the friend who's been asleep for a while responds as expected: 'GO AWAY! If you'd come back at a reasonable hour, we could talk. But I'm not getting out of bed to get you bread now. GO AWAY!' And Jesus says, even though he wouldn't do it for friendship's sake, if the man in need will just keep on knocking long enough, his friend will get up and help him because of his shameless persistence!

That's the way we're supposed to be. When we pray, oftentimes God is saying to us, 'How much do you want this?' How much do you *really* want this? How much faith do you have that God will grant your request? Jesus answer: Keep praying (1 Thess. 5:17)... Be persistent! Finally, when we pray for us, we must...

PRAY THE FIRST PRAYER FIRST. Now, what do I mean that? Here it is...

God hears all our prayers, no matter who we are, no matter where we came from, no matter what life experience we've had; God hears all our prayers. And when we become Christians, we have Jesus' promise that God will answer every prayer, even if he answers in a way that's different than we expected. But I want you to understand this and please here me: *God never promises, nor is obligated to answer the prayers of someone who isn't a follower of Jesus and doesn't have a relationship with God through Jesus.*

Now it's true that God does sometimes answer the prayers of those who don't believe; the theological term is 'common grace.' In that, God will answer the prayers of someone who doesn't believe in him for one of two reasons: 1) to bring glory to God (God's done that throughout history—used someone who's not a believer to bring glory to himself), and 2) to help bring someone into a personal relationship with him. But, once again, God is not obligated, nor does God promise anywhere, to answer the prayers of someone who doesn't believe.

That being said, I want you to know there's one prayer God promises to answer for someone who doesn't believe—the prayer of salvation. When you open your life to God and his will, allowing his son, Jesus, to be Lord of your life, God answers that. Without that prayer—the *first prayer*, you're still separated from God. And *it takes a connection with God for prayer to work...*

So, *you've got to pray the first prayer first!* Look at what Paul says in Romans 10 (9-11): "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. ¹¹ As the Scriptures tell us, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.'" So, the salvation Paul is talking about here is available if we just remember to 'pray the first prayer first.'

Let's finish up today with Romans 10:13. Would you read this with me? **"For 'Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.'"** More on prayer next week...