

## The Posture of Prayer

### Psalm 32

Why is it so hard to find time for prayer? It's all too easy to become distracted, not only by time-wasting media, but also by good and necessary things like profitable work or visiting with family and friends. But as we see in Matthew's gospel, even after spending all day teaching and healing and feeding multitudes of needy people, Jesus set aside time for prayer.

In this way, the Son of David lived out the same priorities of the sweet psalmist of Israel, perhaps the greatest writer of hymns and prayers of all time. So, what can we learn from Jesus' example of prayer? And what can we learn from this Psalm of David?

Well, in the first place, David challenges us to pray with expectation. Indeed, we should be moved to prayer precisely because we expect that God will do great things for us. David affirms this truth in verse six: "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found."

What a wonderful promise. Those who are godly can be assured that any time they pray, God can indeed be found, and thus that God will hear our prayers. And Jesus makes the same point in our responsive reading, doesn't He? "Ask and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Now, that's certainly not the case with merely human relationships. For example, I remember a little antique store, or really a junque shop, near the campus in Lexington Virginia. I used to wander in there on far too many "study breaks," because it was a place where you could find everything – or at least everything that a historian thought was important. I picked up a set of hubcaps for my 1951 Packard, and a wooden table-top radio with a 78-rpm record player inside. The only problem was that you never really knew when the shop would be open. The owner might be playing in his bluegrass band or he might be gone fishing. You just couldn't be sure when you would find him.

But none of us have to wonder whether the door of the throne room of heaven will be open today. No, Jesus, our great High Priest has gone into the holy of holies once for all. That means that right now, He is praying for us in the presence of God the father. And He promises that everyone who asks will receive, and he who seeks will find, and the door will be opened to him who knocks. The good news is that all who are in Christ have an invitation to pray to God with the assurance that He may be found.

But this raises another question, as we return to verse 6. For it also says, "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found." Now, how comfortable are you with the label "godly?" If only the "godly" are welcome to pray to God, where is our confidence? And how can we pray with expectation if we cannot pray with confidence?

This brings us to the second important characteristic of prayer: we must not only pray with expectation, but we must also pray with confession. After all, the Lord's Prayer reminds us that when we pray, we should ask God to forgive us our debts, to forgive us when we fail to pay Him the obedience and faith and love we owe to Him, as well as when we withhold the love and care and service we owe to others.

And Psalm 32 also spends quite a bit of time on confession, doesn't it? It paints with vivid colors a portrait of the man who keeps his sin bottled up inside him: verses 3 and 4 describe him as a grape which withers away into a raisin in the intense heat of a Middle-eastern, or even a Mississippi summer, stooping over as his bones give way under the constant stress of resisting God's will.

And this isn't just the case with spectacular sinners or for those who have not yet made a profession of faith in Christ. No, for every Christian, failing to confess the ongoing sin in our lives is nothing less than defiance toward God. For what did we hear last week when we celebrated the Lord's Supper? "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

And so, if we as Christians do not confess our sins to God regularly, we risk drying up spiritually. We risk spiritual osteoporosis. We call into question whether we are truly relying on God for our salvation or if we are instead continuing in rebellion against Him.

But the good news is that, in Christ, God promises to forgive our sins. David celebrates this truth in the exuberant introduction to his psalm: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

For that is the good news: To all those who are united to Christ by faith, God will impute no sin. The good news is that, by the atoning blood of Christ, the sins of all who trust in Him are forgiven. And this means that, although we have broken God’s law by thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and what we have left undone, God will nevertheless consider us to be sinless because of the penalty for sin that Christ has paid. Indeed, God will account all those who trust in Christ to be righteous because of Christ’s perfect righteousness.

And that wonderful promise brings us to a third important characteristic of the posture of prayer. Yes, we should pray with expectation, knowing that the God Who has given us His Son will give us everything that we need. Yes, we should pray with confession, knowing that the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse us from all sin. But we should also pray with trust.

This, after all, only makes sense. If we expect God to give us what we need, we must trust that He will do it. If we confess our sins, we must trust that Christ has died to pay the penalty for our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Turning away from trusting in ourselves and trusting instead in God is the foundation of the Christian life.

And in Psalm 32, David piles up images to illustrate such trust, thus modeling the kind of faith we all need. He begins in verse 6 with “surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.” This image recalls, of course, God’s protection of Noah in the days of the flood. It also recalls when God ushered the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground, while drowning Pharaoh’s pursuing army. The one who is in Christ has every reason to be confident, because God has protected His people in the past.

But David goes on to claim God’s protection in the present in verse 7. He expresses his personal trust in God: “Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” And it is still the case that God’s promises are not just for Noah, or for the people at the Red Sea, or even for David. No, those promises are for you and for me.

And that means that when we place our trust in God, we aren’t just acknowledging that God was able to save people in general, or that He is able to save someone else. It means that God is able to save us and is willing to save us. It means realizing that Christ’s death shows how much God loves us and wants us to trust him. Trust is thus something personal and relational, not merely intellectual. Trust is a movement of the heart, not just the head.

Notice also the terms in which David expresses his trust. He refers to God as his “hiding place.” He speaks of God as saving him from “trouble.” He speaks of being surrounded, not by enemies, but by shouts of joy. The primary image is one of protection. And the primary benefit of protection is the freedom it provides from every kind of fear.

And maybe you need that kind of freedom today. Maybe you are concerned about corrupt or incompetent politicians, or about the price of groceries and gasoline. Maybe you are worried about your business or your job. Maybe you are afraid that your children or grandchildren will get into serious trouble. Maybe you are concerned about the health of a loved one, or even your own health.

I know that my own tendency to worry grows as my prayer time shrinks. But the good news is that none of us need carry our cares any longer. Instead, we can trust God, finding complete safety in His hiding place, in the arms of our maker and our redeemer. For the one who made the stars knows how many hairs are on each of our heads – or how few. The One who promises, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give

you rest,” is the one Who was willing to die so that He might keep that promise. Can we not trust such a God of amazing power? Should we not trust a God of such amazing love?

And when we trust God, when we come to Him in prayer in a posture of expectation and confession and trust, what can we expect? What will our God do for us? Look at what He promises: “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” Let’s take a minute to unpack each of these precious promises, to think about exactly what God is promising to those who pray.

God’s first promise is to instruct. This word refers to God’s action of making someone wise or prudent. Next, once God has thus made us more able to learn, God promises to teach us the truth, not least through the pages of Scripture, His written Word. But God also teaches us through the sometimes bewildering circumstances of our lives, all of which He controls through His divine providence. And God teaches us through the Person of His Holy Spirit, the One Whom Jesus called the Spirit of truth, and Whom He promised in our responsive reading to give to those who ask Him.

And the promise of God Himself living within us brings us to the last promise God makes to the penitent in verse 8: God will guide us. This word means “advise or counsel.” It also means “plan” and probably refers to plans of action. It is the Holy Spirit Who helps us understand not only what the words of Scripture mean, but how we should live them out in our particular lives on any given day.

And so we move from the receptive learner to the lesson to the application of the lesson in life. Once God has prepared us to learn and then taught us what we should know, He will help us figure out how we should proceed.

But more than that, God will guide us into seeing that His plans are actually the best. For when He prepares our hearts and minds to learn, and when He pours His wisdom into us, we will realize that what He wants for our individual lives, for our church, and for our town, well that’s the best plan of all, even if it doesn’t always make sense to us, or work out in the way or at the time we think it should.

So, just as the Lord Jesus did, let us recommit ourselves to prayer, no matter how busy we may otherwise be. Let us go to God every day expecting that He will reveal His will to us. Let us go to God confessing that we are weak and sinful, and that we need His cleansing and healing power. Let us go to God trusting that He is able and willing to heal us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And then let us claim His promises to make us wise, and to teach us, and to guide us. And let us follow Him, as He continues to work out His purpose of redemption and salvation for us and for others. In all these ways, let us seek the One Who promises that He may be found.