

The Heart of Prayer Psalm 95

By now, I trust you know that 2018 is the going to be a year that we focus on prayer. We've tried to give you some tools that would help you, and let me remind you that those are all available at summitprayer.com. Pastor J.D. has offered motivation and instruction on how to pray in 3 great messages on prayer. This is the 4th week in our sermon series, and some of you are wondering why I'm up here. Well, your best batters always bat clean up.

This week we're going to do things a little differently. I'm going to offer you a few thoughts, and then I'm going to hand things off to our campus teams to actually apply this. We aren't just going to talk about prayer today; we're going to spend time together praying.

Today, I want to talk to you about your heart and prayer. Because if we aren't careful, we can work hard at praying and miss the heart of praying. Several months ago, I spent a few days reading, thinking and praying through Psalm 95. And I want to share 2 insights that came from that time in this Psalm. Let's look at it together.

Psalm 95 begins with a robust call to praise and worship God. The language is full of joy and celebration and trust.

*1 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
2 Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.*

It calls out the character and work of God.

*3 For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
5 The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.*

And reminds us of our relationship to God.

*6 Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
7 for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.*

And all of a sudden, the Psalmist issues a startling warning

*Today, if only you would hear his voice,
8 "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,
9 where your ancestors tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.
10 For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.'*

Those two phrases arrested my attention and I asked this question: How do I (we) know if my hearts is hard and how do I (we) keep it from going astray? One way we can discover what's in our hearts is by examining our prayers

1. PRAYING REVEALS YOUR HEART

We could also say, by extension, that your lack of praying, your silence uncovers your heart. You see, Jesus said in Luke 6:45 *A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.* “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” That’s pretty sobering, isn’t it? Think about the last few days – what did you spend most of your time talking about? your job, your family or another relationship, some new purchase, your worries and fears? Or better yet, what do you find yourself NEVER talking about? What did not make it’s way into your conversations?

Our prayers are produced by the overflow, the excess, the abundance of our hearts. My prayer life - the content of my prayers or my lack of prayer - reveals the condition of my heart.

So what does your praying say about your heart toward God? I want you to walk through the ACTS acronym with me as we examine our hearts in prayer.

A – adoration C – confession T – thanksgiving S – supplication

First, our praying demonstrates that

OUR HEARTS ARE NOT CAPTIVATED BY HIM - adoration

Let’s be honest, most of us are not gushing with praise and adoration, His praise is not continually on our lips. Why? Because we have not been captivated by the majesty and

greatness of God. Simply put, He is not beautiful to us. But that doesn’t mean that nothing is beautiful to me – on the contrary I find other things to be more appealing, more beautiful, more desirable. But why is that? It’s because we don’t take time to gaze on his beauty, consider his character, and marvel at his majesty. We’re too busy or too distracted to really seek after Him. And that has left us as a people who are only vaguely familiar with the character and beauty of our God, not intimately acquainted with it.

I recently read an article by John Piper and he said this:

You can’t savor what you don’t see. You can’t cherish and desire and love and enjoy and treasure what you’re not aware of. If we don’t desire and cherish and enjoy and savor and treasure Christ, we will not commend him as magnificent in what we feel and say and do.

Our praying exposes a heart that is not captivated by God. What else does our praying uncover?

OUR HEARTS ARE NOT BROKEN OVER OUR SIN - confession

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” but you couldn’t always be sure we believe that by listening to our prayers. Confession is not pouring out of us, not because we have not sinned, but because we are not broken by our sin. Sometimes we blame our sin on someone else, or our circumstances, or our upbringing. We call it all kinds of things – a mistake, an indiscretion, a lapse in judgement, a character flaw. But not really what it is – sin, disobedience, rebellion. And all our rationalizing produces in us a heart that is just numb or indifferent to our sin.

But it's not just brokenness over sin that should lead us to confession. It is the promise of forgiveness and cleansing that should cause my heart to love the privilege of confession.

1 John 1:9 (you know it) *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* My friend Doug Stokke said this to me a few months ago and I will never forget it. He said: "I LOVE confession. I get to crawl into the presence of Holy God, dirty filthy, stained by sin. But in His presence I confess that sin and I get to stand up and walk out clean, whole, forgiven. What's not to love about that?" Y'all, that wrecked me. I hate to be wrong. I hate having to admit I messed up again. And I miss the joy that comes in freely confessing my sin. Once more my prayers expose my heart.

But it's not just our sin that fails to move us, it's His goodness, in spite of our sin.

OUR HEARTS ARE NOT OVERWHELMED BY HIS GOODNESS - thanksgiving

Thanksgiving and gratitude are strangely missing or only a minor part of our prayers because we're not astounded by the goodness of God. Maybe it's because we give ourselves credit for the good things we enjoy. Or maybe there's an attitude of entitlement, a sense that we deserve all this. It's possible that we can't see his goodness because there is bitterness and disappointment. He hasn't been good in the way we wanted him to be good. And our hearts are so consumed with what we don't have, or can't do that we miss the blessings that are ours because of Him. If thanksgiving isn't pouring out of me then I know that **MY HEART IS NOT OVERWHELMED BY HIS GOODNESS.**

Even our requests expose us.

OUR HEARTS ARE NOT DESPERATE FOR HIM - Supplication

Supplication, crying out to God, is absent or anemic because we're not desperate. Maybe we're comfortable with things as they are and don't feel the need. Or maybe it's just a lack of trust. We don't think prayer really makes any difference. Or quite possibly it's just a reflection of pride – we're confident in our resources and our abilities. We are not desperate.

But, if I can be honest with you, sometimes it's what I ask for that uncovers my heart. I'm not after Him, I'm after what He can do for me. It seems that too many of my requests are material and physical and temporary. My heart is hungry for comfort and ease and luxury and safety and success. My requests expose my heart. **MY HEART IS NOT DESPERATE FOR HIM.**

But can we be honest today? Many of us already know this about ourselves. it doesn't take much to convince us that Jeremiah 17:9 is right - The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked... But what do we do about it. **WE PRAY.** We pray because...

2. PRAYING CULTIVATES YOUR HEART

At some point, all of us have heard somebody say "Just follow your heart" Can we talk about how absurd that is? Whether you're a Christian or not...we all know our hearts are absolutely unreliable, right?

The Bible never tells us to follow our hearts. It does tell us to: guard our hearts, hide God's Word in our hearts, rend our hearts, ask for a clean heart, receive a new heart, pray for an undivided heart, love, serve and trust God with all our hearts. Listen, you and I aren't supposed to **feel** our way into praying. We're supposed to **truth** our way in. My prayers are not supposed to be an expression of my feelings. My prayers should be an expression of my faith, anchored in the truth of God's Word. That kind of praying changes my heart.

Adoration and Praise can cultivate a heart that is awed by the greatness of God. But that greatness must be observed, studied, considered. Again, from John Piper: *Christ is most magnified in us when we are most satisfied in him, and we cannot be daily satisfied in the depths of our soul in Christ if we don't see him and savor him. My point is that that can only happen by a steady meditation on the word of God in the Bible.*

That's why we have given you a daily Bible Reading plan along with the call to pray. The Word of God is the best fuel for your praise. Look back at Psalm 95. Before it warns us about our hearts, it calls us to delight in our God and bow before Him.

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
⁷ for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

I read that and I wonder, why doesn't that move us? Why is there no shouting? Listen, This God is the real deal. He's epic! He is the God who reigns supreme over everything. He created it all, He owns it all, He sustains it all. He's GOD! He's MY GOD and I belong to Him. We are the sheep of his pasture, the flock under his care. Listen to me: your heart needs to hear your mouth call out the greatness of God, so it learns to cherish and adore Him and believe him and trust him.

A few years ago, for my wife's birthday, I wrote a book for her titled "Things I Love About My Wife." I spent months reflecting on what I loved about her and I wrote out paragraphs that celebrated her and who she is. And yes, she loved it. But I benefited from that far more than she did. Because as I articulated my praise of her, my love and admiration for her grew deeper. Observing, studying, meditating on the greatness of God will do that to you. Speaking of his majesty and glory will turn your heart toward him. Prayers that are saturated with who HE is will grow in you a heart of faith and love.

In the same way, Confession turns your heart toward the wonder of grace. Confession - honest, specific, faith-filled calling sin what it is will bring you greater joy than anything else you can imagine. Confession turns your heart away from yourself and toward the One who bore all your iniquity on the cross. "He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free. His blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me." All that is your when you confess and repent of your sin.

Let me say this before I move on – confession is not about how you feel about your sin, it's telling the truth about your sin. Michelle and I have two boys, 8 & 10, and so you know there's lots of confessing that happens at our house. But when they are guilty of an offense, we do not allow them to lead with "I'm sorry." We ask them to start with "I was wrong to...." How they feel about it is less important to us than them recognizing and admitting that what they did was WRONG. Confession is not saying "I'm sorry" – confession is embracing the truth and agreeing with what God says about who I am and what I've done.

Thanksgiving is yet another key aspect of our praying that can turn our hearts toward God. You see, giving thanks drives me to humility; it acknowledges that all that I am, all that I have is NOT my doing but His. **Thanksgiving fills my heart with faith** because it reminds me of what God has done in the past and calls me to trust for the future. Saying thank you won't guarantee you a genuine heart of gratitude, but not saying thank you will surely produce a thankless heart. Isn't this why we require our children to say "thank you"? Aren't we hoping that acknowledging another's grace to them will lead them to heartfelt gratitude? Let me encourage you to regularly give thanks for the work of God in the lives of others. Use your Bible reading to prompt gratitude for the work of God in history. And let the Gospel remind you the best things God has done are not always physical.

Before I move to the final way that prayer cultivates our hearts, let me say this. Adoration, Confession, and Thanksgiving are essential in praying because they position us to ask rightly.

When you know who you are talking to, and you know what He can do, it changes what you ask for and how you ask.

Finally, Supplication or asking, is a key way that you and I can cultivate our hearts in prayer. Can we be honest today? Most of us are driven by a desire for personal comfort, ease, safety and abundance. Our hearts are most naturally turned inward, and often our prayers reflect that. Praying, as Jesus modeled in what we call the Lord's Prayer, directs our hearts away from self-indulgence and toward daily dependence; away from our petty self-centered dreams and ambitions and towards His kingdom and His glory. When we pray as Jesus did, we are surrendering our plans to his higher purposes. This is why it is so important that you and I learn to pray with our Bible open. When we read first and respond in praying, then we put ourselves in a position to let the purposes and promises of God guide our asking. Jesus said in **John 15:7 *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*** If I am dwelling in, meditating on, saturated with the Word of God, then my desires will be transformed. And my requests will be formed by those new desires that resonate with the heart of God. Praying the Word of God fills my heart with faith.

So today, I'm inviting you, I believe the Holy Spirit is inviting all of us to embark on a journey of heart renewal and transformation through prayer.