



OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS

PRAYER

OCTOBER 4-10, 2015

LEADER'S NOTE: This is both a study on prayer as well as a guide for you and your group to pray through. You will lead your group to pray through the acronym C.H.U.R.C.H. which will help your group members think about six important areas/aspects of prayer: Confession, Home, Unity, Rulers, Community, Heart. After considering each give a few minutes for group members to pray together as a group.

MAIN POINT

God calls us to pray for the purpose of communing with Him, conforming our wills to His, and growing in our relationship with Him.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. If we asked a random sample of people in the Okotoks area, "How can I pray for you?", what kinds of responses do you think we would get? What sorts of things do you think most people in our culture pray about?
2. Compare these responses with the things Jesus commands us to pray about in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-15). How are they similar? How are they different?

Leader: There is a tendency in our consumeristic culture to think of prayer primarily in terms of asking God for things. While that is certainly part of prayer (Jesus taught His disciples to pray to God for their daily bread in Matthew 6:11), such a narrow view misses the ultimate purpose of prayer—to commune with God. God is sovereign, holy, and good. The purpose of prayer is not to get God to act on our behalf, but to surrender to His agenda for our lives and to grow in our relationship with Him. This doesn't mean that we don't ask for things; what it means is that we ask for things in the right way, surrendering our agendas to His kingdom and will (Matt. 6:10). Therefore, we will spend the remainder of our time together considering several things God commands us to pray for and praying together, asking God to move in these areas so that He might be glorified and we might grow to love and trust Him more.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> **CONFESSION - HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 59:1-2.**

Leader: If time allows, read through verse 8.

3. As we commune with God in prayer, why is confession essential?

Pray together, as a group, for God to cleanse us from sin.

Leader: Ask God to help us acknowledge the sin in our lives and how it separates us from Him. Pray that God would help us to repent—to turn away from sin and look to Christ for forgiveness so that nothing interferes with our communion with God.

> HOMES - HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17.

4. According to Paul (v. 13), how should we pray for our families beyond praying for their health and wellbeing? How might unforgiveness hinder our prayers? Our spiritual growth?

5. How can we encourage one another to “let the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts”? In the context of our homes? In the context of our church?

Pray for the families represented in your group—that the Holy Spirit would rest on them and bring healing where there is conflict and division.

Leader: Pray that parents would disciple their children well. Pray that children would trust Christ and grow to love Him with all their hearts. And pray that spouses would strive to love and point each other to Christ.

Pray a second time for the unity and spiritual growth of the people at OEFC.

Leader: Ask God to protect us from disunity. Pray that any who have allowed bitterness to fester in their hearts would repent and seek reconciliation. Pray that we would be a church where people love each other self-sacrificially and forgive one another freely.

> UNITY - HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-7.

6. Why is humility essential to unity? Why is it important that we pray both for humility and unity in the church?

Pray as a group for the Holy Spirit's anointing to be poured upon those leading the church and for each one of us to be the ambassadors of Christ that He has called us to be.

Leader: Ask God to humble us so that we would be willing to set aside our own personal agendas and instead, like Christ, put the needs of others ahead of our own. Pray that God would humble both the leaders and the members of OEFC to submit to the Spirit's leadership so that we might point more and more people to Christ.

> RULERS - HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-5.

7. Why is it important that we pray for the leaders of our provincial and federal government (see Rom. 13:1-2)? What should we ask God to do in and through these leaders?

Pray for those leading our government offices. Pray for their families, pray for a conviction of moral standards. Pray for the upcoming Federal election.

> COMMUNITY - HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-20.

8. What has God entrusted to us as Christ followers (v. 19)? What might it look like for us to be good ambassadors of that which God has entrusted to us in the communities in which we live?

Pray for the town of Okotoks, mayor, council law enforcement, teachers, and for the church's presence in the community.

Leader: Pray that we would be faithful ambassadors for Christ in our community, proclaiming and demonstrating to those around us the reconciliation, hope, wholeness, and wellbeing that can be found in Christ alone.

> HEART - HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 PETER 3:15.

9. What does it mean to “revere Christ as Lord” in your heart? How might we help each other do so?

Leader: The phrase “revere Christ as Lord” can also be translated “to honor as holy.” The idea is to set apart Christ as supreme, to surrender your life and will to Him, to make Him the center of your life.

Pray for a heart to represent Christ and to be able to share your story of God's story. Allow time for whoever feels led to pray, asking God to help them surrender their heart, soul, mind, and strength to Christ.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

10. Of the six things we prayed for today, which do you most often neglect to pray for on your own? How will you pray differently this week?

11. What most often distracts you from spending quality time communing with God in prayer? How might you limit these distractions this week?

Leader: Close out your group time by challenging your group members to incorporate the elements of the C.H.U.R.C.H. acronym in their prayers every day this week. Make a note to follow up with groups members on this next week.

PRAYER

Pray that God would open your eyes to the immense spiritual value of prayer. As we commune with Him in prayer, ask God to conform our desires to His and our purposes to His kingdom.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **Has your prayer life changed since this week's prayer activity? Have you been praying through the C.H.U.R.C.H. acronym? If so, how has this blessed and shaped your prayer life? Your walk with Christ?**
 - **Spend some time praying for the members of our Growth Group. Ask God to help them grow in their relationship with Him.**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize James 5:16.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

ISAIAH 59:1-2

This oracle begins with an affirmation that God can hear and act, characteristics that contrast with the powerless idols that tempted Israel (44:6-23). A selection of the sins that separated God from His people is listed. The list begins with acts of violence and moves on to deceit and injustice. They were guilty in thought and action (they conceive trouble and give birth to iniquity).

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

3:12. After commanding believers to “put away” worldly behaviors, Paul offered a series of positive commands to “put on” or to “clothe yourselves” (Rm 13:14) with behavior fitted for God’s people. The adjectives chosen (Isa 43:20; 65:9; Rm 8:33; 2Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1Pe 1:1; 2:4,6,9), holy (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69; 1Pe 2:9), and loved (Mt 3:17; Eph 1:6; 1Th 1:4; 2Th 2:13) were all applied to Israel, Jesus, and the church. The five virtues are just the opposite of the vices listed in verses 5 and 8.

3:13. The words “accepting” (cp. Rm 15:7; Eph 4:2) and “forgiving” (cp. Eph 4:32) express the habitual manner in which believers exhibit the stated virtues. Both verbs pertain to interpersonal relationships in the body of Christ. “Just as the Lord has forgiven” echoes Jesus’ injunction to forgive because believers are forgiven (Mt 6:12,14-15; 18:23-35; Lk 7:42).

3:14. The imagery here suggests that the final and most important new article of clothing for God’s people is love, “the perfect bond of unity,” that binds believers together in complete oneness (Eph 4:3).

3:15. The peace brought by Christ should control believers’ hearts (Rm 8:6; 15:13; 2Co 13:11; Gal 5:22; Eph 2:14; Php 4:7; 2Th 3:16). “Be thankful” harks back to 1:3,12; 2:7 (cp. 3:17; 4:2).

3:16. The words “teaching and admonishing” express the means of how the gospel is to dwell among believers. “Wisdom... singing, and gratitude” characterize the manner of this teaching and admonishing.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-7

Paul built his challenge for unity on the reality of Christ within each believer. The phrase encouragement in Christ refers to encouragement that comes from Christian commitment. That Christ lived in the Philippians’ hearts was indeed a great blessing for them. The term comfort from love refers to Christ’s love for them. Believers are the eternal recipients of God’s tender affection not because they deserve love, but because it is God’s nature to love. The participation in the Spirit emphasizes the shared nature of the Christian life. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes possible the proper functioning of the body of Christ. With the expression affection and sympathy, Paul pointed to the mercies the Lord had given the believers at Philippi. The Holy Spirit provided rich fellowship among them (v. 1). In verse 2 Paul shifted from the spiritual blessings the believers enjoyed together to their responsibility to him. The Philippian believers had a heartfelt concern for Paul. He planted the church at Philippi. They watched as he invested his life in their lives. Now he called them to continue what they started.

In contrast to his positive instructions, Paul also detailed for the Philippians what attitudes to avoid in pursuing unity. The word nothing (v. 3) emphasized Paul’s conviction that rivalry or conceit should not taint any aspect of the church’s life. The term rivalry implies a selfish ambition that causes disputes and divisions. The sense is that the problems facing the Philippians caused members to choose sides. Paul saw schisms in the church as contrary to the testimony of Christ and dishonoring to God’s name. Also the word conceit describes what is vainglorious or groundless pride. The cornerstone of Christian faith is that humans are powerless to save themselves and must trust Christ to provide all that is necessary for salvation. Thus the believer has no basis for arrogance toward others. Furthermore, arrogance strikes at the heart of Christian unity, spoiling the testimony of the faithful.

To avoid such a destructive mind-set, Paul directed the believers to consider fellow Christians and their needs as more important than their own interests and concerns (v. 4). The church's antidote for selfishness and divisions is an abiding concern for the welfare of others. Paul called the believers to take careful note of the concerns others hold. Such willing consideration of others erases the gaps between individuals and builds a strong unity.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-5

2:1-2. In this verse, the apostle mentioned four different words for prayer. "Petitions" included requests individuals made of God. The term "prayers" was the most general word. "Intercessions" included prayers for other believers. The "thanksgivings" Paul mentioned probably included gratitude for God's blessings. The apostle may not have intended any sharp distinction among the four terms. The use of all four terms emphasizes the importance of prayer in overcoming the false teaching in Ephesus and in winning the lost to Christ. Paul encouraged Timothy to pray for governmental authorities who could help provide an environment conducive to evangelism.

2:3-4 A quiet life of dignity and godliness pleases God. God is also pleased when believers express concern for the salvation of others. Paul directly connected evangelism with pleasing God in this verse. Prayer for the lost pleases God because God wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The false teachers promoted lies, but Paul encouraged Timothy to pray that those lies would be exposed. "Come to the knowledge of the truth" is a way of referring to being converted. "The truth" is often used in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus as a synonym for the gospel.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-20

5:17-18. The words "in Christ" refer to being in union with Him. Genuine conversion begins life transformation, but not by reforming the old nature. The indwelling Spirit creates divine life in believers (Rom. 8:8-10), enabling a life of new things. Other New Testament passages communicate this truth by using language such as "born again" or "regeneration" (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). Those who were enemies of God have now become friends by being reconciled to Him. God's wrath against sin was satisfied in the death of His Son. Sinners—who formerly put self-interest above God's glory (Rom. 1:21; 3:23)—have been brought to cherish God as their highest treasure (2 Cor. 4:6). The ministry of reconciliation—being an agent of this good news—was Paul's special responsibility, but the task belongs to all who have received this ministry.

5:19-21. What Christ did, God did. Christ's death mainly affected the world, that is, human sinners (rather than evil supernatural beings, for whom no divine provision for reconciliation has been made). Christ's death upholds God's righteousness. Trespasses were placed on the One who did not know sin. In return, the righteousness of God is credited (imputed) to all who are in Him. The message of reconciliation is known to others only when ambassadors for Christ spread it. The Great Commission is the responsibility of reconciled human beings, not angels (Matt. 28:18-20).

1 PETER 3:15

Instead of running away, Christians need a renewed allegiance. Set apart Christ as Lord means "to treat as holy or to regard with reverence." Christians are to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Holy One and also as Lord. "Lord" is the New Testament term for the Old Testament personal name for God (see Exod. 3:14-15; 6:2-3), often transcribed as "Jehovah" but more properly as "Yahweh." The New Testament applies the Old Testament title for God the Father to Jesus Christ, thus celebrating the deity of Christ.

The believer is to view Christ as holy, as worthy of reverence because of who He is. To reverence Christ as Lord means to believe that Jesus Christ is in control and that those who come against the believer are not. To have such reverence is to maintain a deep-seated confidence in Jesus Christ as the reigning Lord of the universe (see 3:22). When our lives are centered on Christ, who is in control of the universe, then we are able to respond properly to the uncertainties and inconsistencies of life. When we have made this commitment, we can respond to harm by communicating a positive word regarding our hope in Christ rather than running away. Even while suffering unjustly, Christians are able to go on because of their hope in the future.