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## The Place of Prayer

### John 16:23-27

**Intro:** We are in the last half of **ch16**, the conclusion of the Upper Room Discourse and, as such, these final verses appear in the form of a summary of different topics that have already been discussed. As we saw last time, **vs16-22** Jesus reveals that the circumstances surrounding His soon departure will cause them great sorrow but then He also assures them that their sorrow will be transformed into joy. Jesus will also discuss again His own origin and destiny- His full divinity both before and after the years of His incarnation (**28-30**). He will also further assure the disciples that they will have peace even though they will disperse when Jesus is arrested. This peace will be based on His victory over the world system (**31-33**). In our text today, Jesus will again teach the disciples about prayer.

Again, these are not new topics, they just repeat with some variations themes that Jesus has already touched on. But, just because they are repetitive does not mean they are unimportant. On the contrary, any time Jesus repeats something, that's a clear indication of how important the subject truly is. Add to that truth the fact that it is these few topics that Jesus brings up once again and stresses in His final words just hours before His arrest and crucifixion.

The truth is, this is actually the 4<sup>th</sup> time Jesus mentions or teaches on prayer in this final discourse. As believers, we already know that prayer is an important part of the Christian life, even if we have a tendency to neglect it ourselves. The question we must ask ourselves is "Why is prayer so important?" I think most Christians neglect prayer because they don't have a comprehensive answer to that question. So, by way of introduction today, we're going to step out of character today and do a brief topical study on prayer before we switch back into our exegetical study of our text.

Over 100 yrs ago, R. A. Torrey wrote a book entitled "How to Pray" but before he launched into to the "How" he provides a concise list of reasons why we should pray. He uses **Eph 6:18** to establish the importance of prayer, noting that what Paul is calling for here is nothing less than constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer. He then gives us 11 reasons from

the Word of God why this type of prayer is so important for every Christian.

1) Because there is a devil ([Eph 6:12](#)). The devil is cunning, powerful and never rests. He is constantly plotting the downfall of the child of God. If said child of God is lax in their prayer life, the devil is likely to ensnare them easily. Paul goes on to exhort believers to protect themselves with the armor of God and then wraps it up in [vs18](#) by saying we must add prayer to our defensive strategy or everything else will be for nothing.

2) Prayer is God's appointed means for obtaining things ([Jam 4:2](#)). The great secret to all that's missing in our spiritual experience, Christian life and ministry for God is found in the neglect of prayer. It's the reason behind all the spiritual poverty and powerlessness in the average Christian's life. Why does it seem like the church makes so little headway against the unbelief, error, sin and worldliness of our society today? Why do so many believers show so little progress in spiritual maturity? Why do they see so little fruit for their labors? You have not because you ask not!

3) Because the Apostles considered prayer the most important business of their lives ([Acts 6:4](#)) God gave these men as a pattern for us to follow in our Christian walk. Paul also practiced this ([Rom 1:9](#); [Eph 1:15-16](#); [Col 1:9](#); [I Thess 3:10](#); [II Tim 1:3](#)). All the mighty men of God outside the Bible have been men of prayer. They were different from each other in many areas but in this particular spiritual aspect, they were all alike.

4) Prayer had a prominent place and played an important role in the earthly life of Jesus ([Mk 1:35](#); [Lk 6:12](#)). Jesus occasionally found it necessary to spend an entire night in prayer. The words pray and prayer occur some 25 times in connection with Jesus in the brief record of His life recorded in the Gospels and His specific prayers are also recorded in places where those words are not used. Prayer occupied much of the time and strength of Jesus. Can we properly claim to be a true follower of Jesus if we neglect to spend very much time in prayer?

5) Prayer is the most important part of the present ministry of Jesus ([Heb 7:25](#)). The Lord's ministry for His people didn't end with His death on the cross. His work of atonement was finished there but when He rose from the dead and ascended up to His Father, He began His work of interceding for His people, a work that is based on His atonement and is necessary for our

full sanctification ([Rom 8:34](#)). If prayer is the primary occupation of our Risen Lord, should it not have a prominent place in our lives as well? The wonderful thing is – prayer is something any believer can do! It doesn't matter if you're an invalid or a shut-in, a busy housewife or a harried business man; you may have a lot more to do than pray but you'll never do anything more important than pray. Of course, the best time of prayer we can experience is when we are alone with our Bibles and God possesses our undivided attention.

6) Prayer is God's established means for us to obtain mercy and grace in our time of need ([Heb 4:16](#)). God has appointed a specific way for His people to access these 2 great blessings at the exact time they are needed: it's through prayer boldly offered at the throne of grace! God delight in having us ask like shameless beggars for these things because it reveals the true level of our faith in Him and God is greatly pleased by our faith. In fact, He will give us as much mercy and grace as we are willing to ask for. Would you rather a trickling stream or an overflowing river?

7) Prayer is the way Jesus has appointed for His disciples to obtain the fullness of joy ([24](#)). Why? If we ask in Jesus' name, we get what we ask for but beyond that, answered prayer makes God more real in our lives. When we ask something definite of God and He gives it to us, it serves as further assurance that God is real and not just some fancy theological idea. It is tangible evidence of an intangible God. Also, there's no greater joy on earth or in heaven than direct, personal, intimate communion with God and prayer in the name of Jesus ushers us into such communion with the God of the universe. What is the fullness of joy? [Ps 16:11](#) "In Your presence is fullness of joy."

8) Prayer is God's appointed means for relief from anxiety and the fullness of peace ([Phil 4:6-7](#)). All we need to do is just keep in constant contact with God and when the trials and troubles come, speak to Him about it. How do beleaguered Christians manage to be at peace in the midst of the storms of their life? They do so only through prayer, constant prayer. Worry is a waste of time but prayer never is; it's time invested in spiritual currency with big returns!

9) Prayer is God's appointed means for us being filled with the Holy Spirit ([Luke 11:13](#)). This is true both before and after Pentecost ([Acts 4:31, 8:15](#)).

If we would spend more time in prayer, there would be more of the Spirit's power in our ministry. It doesn't happen by accident, by osmosis or just by merely wanting it really badly. Holy Spirit filling only happens by constant prayer. Constant prayer is needed because we constantly need to be filled.

10) Prayer is how we're to stay watchful and alert for the Lord's return (**Luke 21:34-36**). The only way believers can properly be prepared for the Lord's return is through much prayer. There's quite a bit of talk nowadays about the Rapture and the Second Coming of Jesus but there's a big difference between being interested in the Lord's return and being prepared for it. We live in an environment that is constantly trying to make us unprepared for His coming. The world tends to draw us down with all of its many cares and distractions. We have so many things to think about and consider during the course of a normal day. There are many things that are presented to us as crises and we needlessly spend precious time trying to determine how they are going to impact our lives. The one topic that should always color our attention is the truth that Jesus is coming back soon. How do we keep this in the forefront of our thought processes? Only by a constant watching through prayer.

11) Prayer is important because of what it accomplishes. It promotes spiritual growth. It brings power to our ministry. It facilitates the evangelism of the lost. It brings blessings to the church. It is one of the secrets of a fruitful Christian life. Individually, each one of these reasons should be enough to encourage constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer in the lives of God's people but taken together, it's a demand. Are we up to the task? But, God already knows what I need, why should I pray? Because He desires us to pray to Him so that He might answer us.

Now that we've covered nearly every possible reason why we should pray, let's see what Jesus says about prayer in our text. He'll divulge the nature and privilege of prayer, the conditions for effective prayer and reveal a new promise.

**16-27**- The nature of prayer is implied by the word ask, repeated five times. Once it refers to asking something of Jesus. The other 4 times it refers to asking something of the Father in Jesus' name. The important thing we should understand in this is that the 2 askings are treated the same way, meaning Jesus considered prayer to the Father as essentially the same

thing as the conversation the disciples had been having with Him.

Prayer isn't the activity of some mysterious realm of religious rites or practices that only special people can employ. It was always intended to be the common experience of normal people. Prayer is basically a conversation we have with God. The way the disciples were talking to Jesus during this discourse is the exact same way we should be talking to and asking things of the Father. The disciples asked Jesus a lot of questions in the last few chapters; none of which were very perceptive; in fact, they reveal an abundance of ignorance. But they are natural questions that are uninhibited. That's the point. They are an indication of what the tone of our own prayers should be.

We also see something of the privilege of prayer implied in its nature. What Jesus is saying here is that very soon, as a direct result of His imminent death and resurrection, those who come to the Father in His name may come with the same freedom and boldness that the disciples had approached him with during the days of His earthly ministry. More than that, they may also come to the Father in Jesus' name knowing that their requests will be granted.

It's not likely that the disciples had never prayed to the Father before Christ's resurrection. Surely, they asked things directly from the Father just as they had asked Jesus for things directly. Jesus had given them a pattern for prayer that began with "Our Father in heaven" and included requests for "daily bread, forgiveness and protection from temptation" ([Matt 6:9-13](#)). Before this the disciples hadn't asked anything of the Father in Jesus' name. Now they're instructed to start doing so and understand that whatever they ask the Father for on that basis, He'll give to them. The disciples had looked to Jesus as their Provider but they have not yet begun to consider Him the great Mediator between God and man. This would be one of the great truths that would be more fully revealed by the Holy Spirit.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> teaching of our text concerns the conditions of effective prayer. These conditions are associated with the phrase, in My name. What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? 1<sup>st</sup>) it means coming to God as one who is identified with Jesus by faith, it means to come as a saved person. Prayer is a family privilege. God isn't obligated to hear the prayers of someone who comes to Him in just any way. God only obligates Himself to



respond to the prayers of those who come to Him solely on the basis of the person and work of His unique and Beloved Son.

2<sup>nd</sup>) praying in Jesus' name means praying on the basis of His merit and not on any merit of your own. You can try to cash a check at your bank with a check you have signed but they'll only honor the check if you have sufficient funds in your account to draw from. You can also go to Bill Gates bank with a check from Microsoft that he has signed. It doesn't really matter who you are or how much you have in your account or if you even have an account there, the check will be honored based on his name and his accounts. That's what it means to pray on the merits of Jesus.

When you go to God in prayer, you're going to the bank of heaven. The problem is you have nothing deposited there; you have absolutely no credit there so if you try to go in your own name, you'll get absolutely nothing. But Jesus has unlimited credit in heaven and He has granted us the privilege of going to the bank with His name on our checks and when we go in that way, our prayers will be honored to any extent.

3<sup>rd</sup>) praying in the name of Jesus means praying according to His character and desires; praying as He would pray under similar circumstances. To ask in anyone's name means to ask as though you were that person. This means we're to ask for what Jesus would want, what He is after, and not for our own desires. Can we know what Jesus is after? Can we know His will? Yes! By reading His Word and by allowing the Holy Spirit to interpret the Word to us and correctly guide our requests. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of knowing and studying the Bible if we are to know the will of God.

Still, there are times when we don't know God's will. When that's the case, we should pray cautiously allowing the Holy Spirit to interpret our prayers correctly. On the other hand, when we know God's will, as it's revealed to us plainly in Scripture, we can pray confidently in the name of Jesus and know we'll receive what we've asked of Him.

The 4<sup>th</sup> element of our text is the new promise it gives in regards to prayer. This promise is 2-fold. 1<sup>st</sup>, there's the promise that God will give spiritual understanding to those who ask Him (25). Jesus isn't changing the subject, He just recognized that the disciples weren't really understanding His

teaching and that a lot of what He has said was a “dark saying” to them (figurative language). He assures them that it won't always be this way because one of the things they can ask for in prayer is spiritual understanding. If they ask for it, they will definitely receive it.

Do we often lack understanding? Does the Bible seem a closed book to us at times? Are certain sayings of Jesus or certain doctrines hard to understand? If so, we have this promise that, if we ask, we will receive understanding. Jesus has promised that He will tell us plainly about the Father.

2<sup>nd</sup>, the promise also concerns joy. How does prayer promote joy? Receiving our requests brings satisfaction and makes us more conscious of the favor of God towards us. Prayer also makes God real because who's really going to waste much time talking to an idea? God is real and our answered prayers give real evidence of this as God is actually there dispensing the gift and meeting us on a personal level.

The one irrefutable truth I have learned over all my years of being a Christian is that we simply do not drift into spiritual life; thus, we will not drift into a disciplined prayer life. We will never grow in our practice of personal prayer until we plan to pray – a failure to plan is a plan for failure. This means, as God's children and as true followers of Jesus Christ, we must consciously set aside time to do nothing but pray. Not monthly or weekly but daily.

What we actually do reflects our highest priorities. I realize we all have responsibilities but have we begun to realize that constant, persistent, sleepless, overcoming prayer is both one of our greatest responsibilities as Christians as well as one of our greatest privileges. Of course, just being regular in prayer is not a guarantee that effective prayer is taking place. True spirituality can never be coerced. We must avoid falling into the trap of mere formalism and ritual in our prayers by striving to be natural in our approach to God and specific in the requests we bring to Him.

It is a joy to stand in God's presence in the name of Jesus and make and receive requests of him. Do you know that joy? If not, you must take the time to actually come into the presence of God and learn to pray. If you need help, He will help you. He will help you because He loves you and

wants to be known by you. Just remember, effective prayer is the fruit of an intimate relationship with God, it is not a technique for acquiring blessings.

