

40 DAYS OF PRAYER: PRAYING IN FIVE DIRECTIONS

Sermon written by Martha Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Ephesians 6:18

Today we continue our 40 Days of Prayer – making prayer a priority for our lives – and the life of the church. What a privilege we have to go to the throne room of God in prayer –and know God cares and is listening to every one of our prayers.

But sometimes we fail to take advantage of that privilege – because we just get busy and put prayer on the back burner. Or we just don't know how to pray or what to say. What is the right posture to have in prayer – and the right words?

Three ministers were talking about prayer one day, and they began debating among themselves the most appropriate and effective positions for prayer. As they talked, they were totally oblivious of a telephone repairman working on the phone system in a corner of the room where they were sitting.

One minister said he believed that the key to prayer was in the hands. He always held his hands together to show a firmness of commitment and then pointed his hands upward as a symbolic form of worship. The second minister countered, real prayer could only be made if a person was on his knees. That, to him, was the proper position for submission to God. The third suggested that the very best position for prayer was to pray while stretched out flat on the floor – showing the position of supreme surrender.

By this time, the telephone repairman could no longer refrain from adding his opinion: “Well, I have found that the most powerful prayer I ever made was while I was suspended 40 feet above the ground dangling of side down by my heels from a telephone pole.”

What is the most powerful prayer you can make? And what is the best posture?

When I was a young girl, just learning how to pray, I loved talking to God at night when I went to bed. And I would always say my prayers out loud. And I guess I must have been rather loud as I prayed – because I remember my mother knocking on the wall to my bedroom and asking me what I was doing and why I was being so loud. I told her that I was praying out loud to make sure God could hear my prayers. That's when I learned to pray silently – and that God could hear the prayers of my heart.

I truly think that the most powerful prayers are the ones that come from our hearts – where we are real with God and declare our dependence on Him. In Psalm 62:8, King David calls us to “*Trust in God at all times and pour out our hearts to Him.*” God wants us to be praying at all times – indeed, making prayer a lifestyle. What matters is that we are seeking God with all our hearts – every day – and drawing near to God in a close relationship. God wants to hear from you because He loves you. He cares about every detail of your life – and He wants us to share all of our lives with Him in prayer.

Our Scripture reading for today comes from Ephesians 6, verse 18. The Apostle Paul urges us to *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”*

How is it possible to pray at all times – on all occasions? My Life Application Bible shares some good insights. It says, *“One way is to make quick, brief prayers your habitual response to every situation to meet throughout the day. Another way is to order your life around God’s desires and teachings so that your very life becomes a prayer. You don’t have to isolate yourself from other people and from daily work, in order to pray constantly. You can make prayer your life and your life a prayer while living in a world that needs God’s powerful influence.”*¹

And notice it says to pray with all kinds of prayers and requests. There are so many ways to pray, and I want to talk today about praying in Five Directions. These words I share today have been inspired by Pastor Rick Warren in his message about praying in Five Dimensions.³ I have discovered as I have been trying to incorporate these Five Directions in my prayer life this week - it has lifted me up and helped me refocus on God’s strength and power – and purpose for my life.

The first direction is to look upward. We begin our prayers by looking upward to the face of our loving, heavenly Father. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He began with the words, *“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.”* Our prayers should always begin by acknowledging who God is – and lifting our eyes up to Him. When we call God “Father” – we follow the example of Jesus who called God “Abba” or Father. It reflects an intimacy and a closeness that we have as a child of God. We can come to God in prayer, just as a child comes to a loving parent. Prayer is always first and foremost about that relationship – and it begins with who God is.

As we begin our prayer, we remember who God is and how much God loves us. And we can call on Him with many names, in addition to Father. As Rick Warren says, *“God’s names tell us who He is. He is our Creator who made you, your Father who loves you, and your Savior who forgives you. He is your Shepherd who guides you and your Shield who hides you. He is your Counselor who gives you wisdom and your Comforter who gives you strength. He is the best Friend you will ever have.”*²

Now when you begin your prayers looking upward and remembering those names of God – your focus is on Him and not your problems or worries. What I have discovered is that when I intentionally look upward as I begin my prayers, I am filled with new strength and hope. When I look at how big and powerful God is – my problems seem to be much smaller.

And in looking upward – we also say our prayers of Thanksgiving for who God is and for His many blessings.

Remember Psalm 100? That psalm is actually a song – a worship song that taught the Jews to know and understand what kind of spirit you need when you enter into the presence of God and commune with Him. It goes like this:

*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the Lord is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations.*

Begin your prayers by looking upward – thanking God for who He is and reminding yourself of His love and faithfulness.

And next, look inward. Once you have acknowledged the wonderful presence and power of the Lord – you need to do some housecleaning if you will – and confess your sins. By looking inwardly, you do a heart check-up and ask God to clear out all the sin that is there that separates you from God.

Psalms 139:23-24 says it this way: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”* We ask God to point out what sin is lingering in our life – and then we repent and ask God to help us change. *“God, show me what needs to change in my life and help me to be more like you – a little more loving and patient, joyful and forgiving.”*

We look upward to who God is – we look inward to who we are – and then we look backward to the cross. It is so important to remember how deeply God loves us and sent His Son to die on the cross for us. We have just looked inwardly and confessed our sins – now we look backwards and remember all that Jesus did for us – and how our sins are forgiven.

In looking “backward” we are fixing our eyes on Jesus, who died on the cross for us. As it says in Hebrews 12:2, *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

If we keep our eyes on Jesus – and remember all that He did for us on the cross, we will be filled with His amazing, all sufficient grace. But we will stumble if we look away from Him and focus only on ourselves and our circumstances. By looking to the cross – we can claim God’s great gift of forgiveness and unfailing love and have the strength to go forward, standing on the promises of His great love for us.

We look upward at God and His great love for us. We look inward and confess our sins – and then backward in remembrance of God’s amazing grace. Then then, we are called to look outward. When we look outward, we look at the world and the people around us. We take time to intercede for our neighbors, lifting them up in prayer. And then we say, “Holy Spirit, show me where you want to use me today.”

Romans 6:13 says, *“Give yourselves completely to God – every part of you – since you’ve been brought back to life – and you want to be used as a tool in the hands of God, used for His good purposes.”*

This is a prayer of dedication and commitment - to tell God – “I’ll go where you want me to go. Use me Lord for your glory. Make me a blessing as You have blessed me.”

Sarah Young, the author of the well-known devotional book *Jesus Calling*, says that one of the ways she learned to pray while she was in seminary was to say, “Help me, Holy Spirit.” Her professor said that he used that prayer all throughout the day – before answering the phone or doorbell, when engaged in an important conversation, when attempting to do something difficult. That prayer became part of Sarah Young’s daily prayer and continually reminds her that the third person of the Trinity is always available to help her.⁴

I think that prayer could also be “Holy Spirit – use me.” In my neighborhood – in my workplace – at this family gathering. “Holy Spirit – use me to make a difference – to shine for You.”

Look upward to God, look inward for examination, look backward to the cross, look outward at the world, to be used by the Holy Spirit – and then finally – look forward.

We are called to look forward in faith – looking to God who goes before us and calls us to follow Him. We pray, “God help me to keep moving forward step by step and to trust the You have wonderful plans for my future.”

Philippians 3:13-14 says, “*Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*”

In our prayers we stretch forward – looking to the goals and the plans God has for us – knowing that God is going ahead of us to prepare the way. We keep our eyes on Him and ask Him to lead us each step of the way.

And we pray with confidence that God will be with us as we go into the future and will never leave us. He will give us the strength we need and lead us in the path we should follow if we trust in Him.

Practice Praying this way – fill in the blank slide on power point

We should be in such close fellowship with God that there is unbroken communication with God. We're walking with Him and talking with Him at all times – in every part of our day. Pray in the Spirit at all times - throughout every direction you go. And see what a difference it will make in your life.

PRAYER

INVITATION

RESOURCES:

¹Life Application Bible, New Living Translation, Ephesians.

²Rick Warren, “*40 Days to a Wonderful Prayer Life*”, page 69.

³Rick Warren, “*40 Days of Prayer: Praying in Five Dimensions*”, www.pastors.com

⁴Sarah Young, *Jesus Listens*”, Thomas Nelson, 2021.