

TEACH ME TO PRAY

JOHN 14:13

# THE CROSS



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**FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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# INTRODUCTION

For most Christians, whenever we hear the topic of a sermon series is prayer, we say to ourselves, "Prepare to feel very guilty." I don't know any Christian who is happy with their prayer life. Few if any Christians will say, "I'm happy with my prayers....I'm good at praying...I have no problem with prayer." Instead, we feel convicted about the poverty of our prayers and that sense of condemnation dissuades from praying or even thinking about how to improve our prayers. That's why I want to begin this series about prayer by facing up to our prayer problems but also bringing to you God's prayer solution. **What's God's solution to our prayer problems? What's God's answer to our prayer puzzles?**

## BACKGROUND

Before we answer that question, let me lay out the series for you. When I started thinking about this series, I initially thought of answering specific questions about prayer: What is prayer? Who do we pray to? When do we pray? What do we pray for? Does God answer all our prayers? and so on.

But having reflected on the series further, I decided to take a more textual approach rather than a topical approach. A topical approach would involve us skipping around a lot of scriptural passages rather than focusing mainly on one. That's a good method for Bible studies, but not so good for sermons.

Also, I wanted less abstract approach. I wanted something more concrete, something more memorable. That directed me towards the places of prayer that we find in the Bible. So, the series will look something like this:

- The Cross (John 14:13)
- The Throne (Hebrews 4:14-16)
- The Battlefield (Ephesians 6:10-20)
- The Table (Rev. 3:20)
- The Door (Matt. 7:7-10)
- The Window (Psalm 73:17)
- The Calendar (Daniel 6:10; 1 Thess. 5:17)
- The List (Matthew 6:7-14)
- The Help (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:26-27)
- The Hospital (James 5:13-18)
- The Family (Acts 1:13-14)

In the course of this series, we will answer many of the original questions I mentioned, but our focus will be on these images and places that will help the answers stick better.



What are some of our prayer problems?



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# 1. WE HAVE MANY PROBLEMS WITH PRAYER

Here are some of the problems that we can encounter in prayer:

- **We don't really believe it works:** We do it but we don't expect much to change.
- **We have many unanswered prayers:** It sometimes seems we have more unanswered than answered prayers.
- **We use "vain repetitions":** We say the same things over and over either unthinkingly or superstitiously.
- **We get legalistic:** We think we will be heard for our much speaking or our impressive speaking.
- **We pray too long or too short:** Either way, we leave prayer feeling more guilty than before.
- **We get angry with God:** Why is he so slow to answer? Why has he shut heaven's doors to me?
- **We forget to pray:** We can go hours, even days, without prayer.
- **We are too formal or too flippant:** We approach God in a business suit or a bathing suit.
- **We pray to show off:** We think more about what people think of our prayers rather than what God thinks.
- **We don't ask:** We have not because we ask not (James 4:2) because we think it's too big or too small for God.
- **We ask for the wrong things:** We prioritize the physical and material over the spiritual and eternal.
- **We ask for the wrong reasons:** We are motivated by self-satisfaction and self-centeredness (James 4:3)
- **We doubt God's listening:** We send prayers towards God but don't really believe he stops to listen.
- **We are hypocritical:** We look and sound pious in prayer but we live ungodly lives (Mark 12:40)
- **We use prayer as a last resort:** We try everything before we try prayer.
- **We get focused on results not relationship:** We use God as a clerk rather than relate to him as a friend.
- **We see it just as an obligation:** I know I should pray, but I don't really want to.
- **We are too ashamed to pray:** We have sinned and cannot face God until we've cleaned up a bit.
- **We pray our will not God's:** We don't ask or consult about what God wants but focus only on what we want.
- **We are blind to God's answers:** We pray, and God answers, but we do not return to prayer to thank him.

## CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

**Confess.** Let's confess our sinful prayers to God. "Lord I don't believe prayer works, I am discouraged by so many unanswered prayers, I often use vain repetitions, I am legalistic in prayer, and so on."

**Seek help.** Let's ask for the Holy Spirit to change our prayers. We cannot do this ourselves no matter how many books we read, sermons we hear, resolutions we make. We need outside help.

PRAYING CAN ADD SIN  
RATHER THAN SUBTRACT SIN



What's the solution to these problems?  
Where can we go to get help?



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## 2. GOD HAS ONE SOLUTION TO PRAYER PROBLEMS

**Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it** (13-14. See also John 15:16; 16:23-24).

Does this mean that we will get what we want if we simply add "in Jesus' name" to our prayers. Many in the "name it and claim it" movement seem to think so. As one Christian man recounted: "On one occasion, I mentioned to a self-proclaimed 'prophetess' that I was going bald. Instantly, she placed her hand on my head and shouted, "No you're not—in the name of Jesus!" That 'prophetess' treated prayer like a credit card she could whip out at any time to make major purchases."

What then does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? Let's begin by looking at the background to the words, which is Christ comforting his disciples in the prospect of his departure from them. He reassured them that despite his absence from them, they would continue to have miraculous powers through faith that would result in even more conversions (12), and continued access to Christ and his power through prayer (13-14).

**We're praying by Christ's merits not our own.** We are saying, "Our only hope of a hearing is the merit of Christ that he earned by his life, death, and resurrection." We're asking our heavenly Father to hear us not for our sake, but for Jesus sake. We're coming to God's throne united to Christ by faith and admitting that without Christ's work on the cross we would never get a hearing at the throne. It's saying, "We have no right or authority here, but we're asking for Christ's authorization."

**We're praying for pardon for our prayers.** All these prayer problems we mentioned are all covered by the Name" of Christ, his person and work that secures our forgiveness and pardon.

**We're praying for Christ's will not our own.** While presenting our will we are submitting to Christ's will. We bring all our desires and longings to our Father but say, "Whatever is not on Christ's lists, please strike it. If it does not match Christ's desires, let his have the last word." As Clayton Kraby said, "Prayer is like a man in a rowboat pulling on a rope tied securely to the shore. He is not pulling land toward him, he is pulling himself towards the land." We will increasingly align to God's will as we are shaped by his Word and prayer

**We're praying in communion with Christ.** "In" speaks of relationship both in the baptism formula and this prayer formula. Prayer is not just a list of requests, but an invitation to communion and relationship.

**We're praying for Christ's glory not our own.** We are asking God to advance Christ's interests above all others. As Aaron Berry said, "Praying in Jesus' name is less about including the phrase at the end of your prayer, and more about positioning your heart properly when you pray."

### CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

**Pause.** Every time we say this phrase, "In Jesus' name" we are invited to stop, to linger at the cross, and ponder what Christ has done for us and who he is to us. Pause and be pardoned for all your prayer problems.

**Power.** "What a powerful name it is, the name of Jesus. While we must not over-apply this name, neither must we under-apply it. It's not a magic wand but neither is it a thoughtless full-stop. It's the most persuasive name in heaven.

JESUS'S NAME IS  
POWERFUL AND PERSUASIVE



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



## SUMMARY



## A NEW CHAPTER

**Repent of your prayers.** Even our prayers for forgiveness need forgiveness.

**Re-order your prayers.** Put Jesus name at the start of your prayers for a time to encourage and edit your prayers.

**Re-shape your prayers.** Let the cross perfect and power your prayers. Cross-shaped prayers are God-heard prayers.

**Prayer.** Lord Jesus, I love your name and thank you that I can pray in your name for pardon of my prayers and power in my prayers.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What have been your greatest prayer problems and why?
2. How have you tried to fix your prayer problems in the past?
3. What has helped or hindered your prayer life?
4. How will this sermon change your prayers?
5. How does the Gospel influence your prayers?
6. How can you disciple someone else to pray in Jesus name?

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