

PRAYER

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 20 September 2020
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Introduction

Today we will consider the final of the four foundations of fellowship – the dimension of grace that is *prayer*.

There are three primary contexts for prayer as believers: individual prayer; prayer as households; and prayer as a church, which is corporate, or house to house, prayer.

In this session, we will focus particularly on *personal prayer*. We will consider prayer in our families and from house to house in our next session.

By the diligence of faith we give time to prayer

Prayer is foundational to the life of a Christian.

It is the first and most basic, ongoing *expression of our faith*.

This is an important point.

We need to make time to pray. This is part of the *diligence* which the Scriptures call ‘the precious possession of a man’. Pro 12:27.

Diligence is a precious possession.

We know that this is the *diligence of faith*, because the Scriptures describe this faith as ‘more precious than gold’. 1Pe 1:7. Prayer is a diligence that we are to have; and it is the diligence of faith which we receive *by hearing the word*.

The apostle Paul taught that we receive faith by *hearing* the word of God. Rom 10:17.

Then, having received ‘the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke”, we also believe and therefore *speak*.’ 2 Co 4:13.

So, we *hear* the word; we *obtain faith* which is more precious than gold; and this faith enables *diligence*.

Prayer is the first expression of faith that speaks

The demonstration of having received faith is that we *speak*.

Speaking is a conversation, isn’t it? As we have been learning recently, speaking is our *conversation* and, equally, our *conduct*.

Prayer is the first expression of this conversation.

Prayer is the conversation and conduct that praises and glorifies God

We will read a passage highlighting this *connection* between prayer and our conversation, or conduct:

‘Whoever offers praise glorifies Me.’ Psa 50:23.

We offer praise through prayer. This is a dimension of our praying.

Then the psalmist continued, ‘And to him who orders his conduct [or conversation] aright I will show the salvation of God.’ Psa 50:23.

The word there for ‘conduct’ is equally ‘conversation’. So, prayer is the means by which we are praising and glorifying the Lord.

Prayer connects us to the pathway of salvation

It is a conversation and a conduct that we are to ‘order’ through diligence, by faith.

As we do this, we are being ‘shown the salvation of God’.

That literally means that we are being shown ‘the pathway of our salvation’.

So, prayer is fundamental to *connecting us* to the *fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings*, so that we can obtain the salvation that He pioneered for us through His offering journey.

Prayer is a conversation of faith received through hearing His word

If we do not receive faith *by hearing the word*, we have *no capacity* to participate in the conversation of prayer.

This is an important point!

It means that if we reject the word that is being proclaimed by Christ, through His messengers, our prayers are *not being heard* by Him.

This is because we are not speaking *the conversation of faith* which is only possible by *His faith* that we receive by *hearing the word*. It is by faith that we *speak*.

Those who love His living word will be people of prayer

On the other hand, if we *are* receiving and living by the word, we *will be* a person of prayer.

Do you see the point?

We cannot be those who are diligent, loving to hear and read the word, and then not be part of the conversation that is motivated by the faith that we receive by hearing the word.

Hearing personally from the Lord in prayer is not an alternative to hearing through His messengers

Now, speaking by *faith* also means that prayer is not an *alternative* to hearing from the Lord through His messengers.

We cannot set prayer, and what we hear in the Spirit as we pray, over against what the Lord is saying to us by His messengers.

Prayer is *because* we hear and receive this living word.

On this point, we know that there are some who claim that they personally hear from the Lord in prayer. *We should* personally hear from the Lord in prayer!

However, these claim that what they hear personally from the Lord in prayer takes *priority over*, or is *an alternative to*, the word of Christ ministered by His messengers.

The Scriptures describe what they hear in their prayer, as ‘the imaginations of their heart’. Jer 13:10.

True prayer fellowship – obedience to His voice

The Lord declared, ‘But this is what I commanded them, saying, “Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people”.’ Jer 7:23.

That is straightforward, isn’t it?

The statement, ‘I will be your God and you shall be My people’, is the statement of the Everlasting Covenant.

God was saying, ‘If you will obey My voice, you will be *connected to my Everlasting Covenant*’, which is you becoming a son of God in fellowship with Yahweh.

Then He continued, ‘And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’ Jer 7:23.

How is He ‘commanding’ His people?

It is through *His messengers*, isn’t it?

Hearing with the awakened ear of a disciple

‘Yet they did not obey or incline their ear.’ Jer 7:24.

Do you see how important it was that we took time to talk about *discipleship*?

A disciple is one who has their *ear awakened* because it is *nailed to Christ* and awakened by coming up from the dead. That is a person who ‘inclines their ear’ to the word. They have *given it to Christ Himself* to receive what He is saying.

The imaginations of the heart are not true hearing

‘Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.’ Jer 7:24.

This is an amazing statement!

That word ‘dictates’ literally means ‘imaginations’.

These who claim that they trust in the counsel of their own heart are *imagining* that they are hearing from the Lord.

And He said that this is the imaginations of ‘an evil heart’.

Trusting in our own counsel, we go backward

Further, He said that, because of this, they *do not go forward*.

‘Going forward’ is in the fellowship of Christ’s offering, isn’t it? It is on the *pathway* that He was walking. To ‘go forward’ is to go forward *with Him!*

He said that they ‘*go backward*’; they do not arrive at the salvation that He has pioneered for them.

Do you see that we must be *careful* that we do not regard our *own* counsel and the imaginations of our *own* mind over what the Lord is saying to us through His messengers?

The Lord does speak personally, but faith is received through the proclaimed word

The Lord *does* speak *personally* to us as we pray.

However, what the Spirit says to us, as we are praying, never *contradicts* what He is saying to the church through the presbytery in Christ's hand.

In fact, He may put on our heart a Scripture or a song or a 'sense' that is then ministered as faith to us in the communion, *through the word*.

Do you see that faith comes by *hearing* what is *proclaimed*?

Faith does not come because I have a sense of what the Spirit is saying. Even though He is speaking to me, the *capacity for faith* is because I am *receiving His word* as it is proclaimed by those whom He has *sent*.

This is the word that is proclaimed by the Spirit *from a fellowship in one Spirit*.

What the Spirit is saying to us, as we are praying, does not contradict what He is proclaiming through His messengers, who are in a fellowship of one Spirit. That would be confusion, wouldn't it?

The Spirit leads and speaks personally regarding our response to the word

This proclaimed word is a lamp to our *feet* and a light to our *path*.

The Spirit who leads us in this pathway of truth *does speak* to us concerning the *practical implications* of the word from the Father regarding our sonship in Christ.

In fact, if there is time in this session, we will consider Daniel, who did this very thing. He gave his attention to the prophetic message proclaimed through the writings of Jeremiah; then was engaged in prayer and repentance, and received illumination from the Lord Himself concerning the future, the eschatology, not just for the nation of Israel, but for the whole world.

Prayer is a daily, continual faith conversation

Prayer is a conversation by faith.

The first conversation in which we are engaged is our personal prayer with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the daily, devotional prayer of a disciple son, whose ear is awakened morning by morning. Isa 50:4.

While that does literally mean 'morning by morning', the point is that it is *daily* and *continually*.

'Prayer in the morning' is connected to *how we are walking* throughout the day.

There is not a 'law' as to when is the right time to pray. Rather, we should be praying every day and *at all times*.

That is what the 'conversation' is: it is not only *what* we are speaking in prayer; it is *how* we are *walking* in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Prayer is a spiritual activity motivated by faith – a relational conversation

Prayer is a *spiritual* activity.

Therefore, we cannot pray according to the flesh. Although our prayer is to be spiritual, the way in which we pray can make it a *carnal* activity.

How do we do this?

Our fears, anxieties and disappointments must not be the *motivation* for our prayer. People are very willing to pray when panicking, or under pressure, or feeling ill at ease. These motivations, or their impact upon us, are not the reason why we pray.

Our prayer is our *ongoing, relational conversation* with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Faith, working *by the love of God* poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is to be the basis of our speech in prayer. Gal 5:6. Rom 5:5.

It is not to be motivated by fear, anxiety, disappointment and so on.

Hearts guarded from deviating to the flesh – kept in the fellowship of His offering

Paul wrote, in his letter to the Philippians, 'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything [in *every circumstance* of life] by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' Php 4:6-7.

What is He guarding us from?

That peace is *guarding* us from *deviating to the flesh* as the way that we are *perceiving* our life, and how we should *proceed* in life.

Our hearts and minds are guarded *through Jesus Christ* – which means that we are kept, or maintained, in the *fellowship* of His offering and sufferings.

That is what it means to be 'spiritual'.

We are not to be anxious for anything, but, in everything, by prayer and supplication - prayer and supplication *only possible by the Holy Spirit* - with thanksgiving, we are letting our requests be made known to God.

The content of our prayer - asking according to the will of God

But we are asking not according to our own desires; we are asking *according to the will of God*.

In the same way that prayer is not to be *motivated* by fear, anxiety and disappointment, the *content* of our prayer - what we are praying for - should also not be carnal.

It should not be the desires of our heart, based in *our* knowledge or perception of what is good or evil.

Do you see that that would be carnal prayer? That is not a spiritual expression.

Nor should it be petitions of the Lord that are based in *our understanding of a particular matter*. Do you see that this would be seeing through 'veiled' eyes? This is also fleshly, or carnal.

The apostle James was quite clear on this point.

'Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?'

This 'war' is *your* perception of good and evil, isn't it?

'You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.' Jas 4:1-2.

A person who is 'not asking' is a person who is not praying. We are supposed to let our requests be made known to God through prayer; so, if we are not asking, that means we are *not praying*.

Maturing in prayer - carnal to spiritual

But there is another element here.

'You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.' Jas 4:3.

Do you see that this is an asking in relation to what *I think is good for me*? That would be *carnal* prayer.

Praying for things that *we want* or according to our *own understanding* is often the way that little children pray, isn't it? I am not saying this is inordinate for them; but their prayer is quite mixed.

They have been born of the Spirit. Many of our children have the Holy Spirit, and they will be motivated to pray for Grandma's sore knee and for other needs in the house - and also perhaps for the dog! (I might have prayed at the odd time for the Australian cricket team!)

There is a degree of 'mixture' that occurs which is the evidence of *immaturity*. But we help our children, don't we? We instruct them to pray - 'we need to pray for this matter, and this person' - and the children are engaged in that.

They are caught up in this with us, as well as praying for all those other things that are simply immaturities.

This way of praying, in relation to what we perceive or think that we need, can also be the way that new Christians, who are like little children in the Lord, begin to pray.

For both 'literally' little children in the Lord, and those who are new Christians, who are 'little' sons of God, this mixture is not surprising; and neither is it inordinate. This is not a problem.

Maturing in prayer as we mature in Christ

However, we are *all* supposed to *grow up*, or mature, as sons of God.

Sadly, there are many Christians who have not matured as sons of God. They are still like immature children in the Lord, although they may have been a believer, or a religious adherent, for many years.

In his writing to the Corinthians and to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul noted this tendency towards immaturity.

'And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to *spiritual* people but as to *carnal*, as to *babes* in Christ.' 1Co 3:1.

Remember, prayer is a *spiritual* activity, and it is supposed to be speech *by faith, in the Spirit*; but we can be believers, and identify as Christians, yet not be able to engage in that conversation because we are *carnal*.

Paul was addressing Christians who had been part of the Corinthian church for some time. He commended them for all their gifts, capacities and articulation. But he wrote, 'You are still like *little babies* in the way that you understand your *conversation* and *conduct* as a Christian.'

Note the connection between carnality – in the flesh – and immaturity; babes in Christ.

Maturing in Christ, as we 'priest' ourselves in the fellowship of His offering

In the book of Hebrews, Paul also addressed them on the point of their immaturity.

'And having been perfected [writing about Christ], He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek".' Heb 5:9-10.

The entire focus of this passage of Paul is on the priesthood of Christ. The priesthood that Christ is *priesting to us* is a *participation* in the *fellowship of His offering* and sufferings.

And we are to 'priest' *ourselves* in the fellowship of that offering and sufferings. This is the whole thesis of Paul in these passages in the book of Hebrews.

'Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain ...' Heb 5:11

So, these are 'big' points; these are the 'meat' of the word. Why is it hard to explain to us?

'Because you have become dull of hearing.' Heb 5:11. Something has affected our capacity to hear!

'For though by this time you ought to be teachers ...' Heb 5:12. This does not mean that everybody is supposed to be a teacher or a 'master'.

The point of Paul's exhortation was, 'You should be able to disciple others.'

How do we disciple others?

We disciple others by *joining them to the very fellowship of offering to which we are priesting ourselves*.

Paul's admonition was, 'By this time, you should be able to *exemplify, communicate* and *join people to this*; but you have become dull of hearing.

'You need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have

come to need milk [like a little baby] and not solid food.' Heb 5:12.

Transitioning from immature prayer to understanding

Do you understand the point?

Those who are carnal remain immature in the Lord, and this will inevitably be reflected in *the way that they pray*.

They will pray for the things that they believe need to be done or be driven by the emotions of the situation that they are in.

We have noted that 'speech' is our conversation; and the most fundamental conversation is *prayer*.

Paul addressed this point of transitioning from immature speech, from the speech of a child (which, in Christ, is one who is carnal) to a person who has understanding.

He wrote, 'When I was a child [or a young believer], I spoke as a child [or, we could say, "I prayed like a child"], and I understood as a child. [My perception of myself and my life and what it meant for me was childish, immature, carnal.]

'I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man [this is one who is growing up in the fullness of the stature of Christ], I put away childish things.' 1Co 13:11.

Growing up as a son of God - poor in spirit

How do we put childish things away?

If we are spiritual, we recognise that we cannot do that *ourselves*.

We 'put away childish things' by putting them to *death in the fellowship of Christ's offering* and sufferings.

Do you see that 'maturity' requires that action? Maturity is, by definition, the *connection to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings*.

In contrast to the one who is immature, or a babe in Christ, or still praying carnally, a person who is becoming spiritually mature is *poor in spirit*.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' Mat 5:3.

Such a one is obtaining 'blessing', which means that they are *growing as a son of God*. The 'blessing' of God is you obtaining your sonship. A person who is poor in spirit is obtaining that blessing.

They are *growing up*, because this virtue - the virtue of being poor in spirit - has become a *foundation* in their life.

The demeanour and prayer of one who is poor in spirit

As those who are poor in spirit, they know that they are *unable to deliver themselves* from their own carnality.

Their prayer is not to be 'better', or for their situations to get 'better'. Even before they articulate something, their *demeanour* or a foundational virtue is that they accept that they *cannot change themselves*.

They confess that they do not even know *how* to pray in relation to the *circumstances* of their life, nor the *implications of the word* that they are hearing.

'For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought.' Rom 8:26.

That is 'poor in spirit'! That is the *weakness* of one who has had this virtue *established* in their life, and they are blessed and growing up as a son.

Praying in the Spirit, who helps in our weakness

However, they have also received the Holy Spirit, who is their Helper; the Spirit who helps in this weakness. Joh 14:16, 26. Rom 8:26.

'Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' Rom 8:26.

Paul was referring here to the speech of 'tongues'. 'Praying in the Spirit' is praying in tongues.

When Paul wrote 'cannot be uttered', he did not mean that we do not 'utter' tongues. He meant that we do not *know* what we are saying. That is why it cannot be uttered - because, if we were to pray in our language, we would not know what to pray as we ought.

The Holy Spirit joins us to Christ's prayer

'Now He who searches the hearts [speaking about Christ] knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' Rom 8:27.

There are two prayers here. The *Holy Spirit* is praying; and *the Son* is praying for us to the Father. Heb 7:25.

Where did the Son *begin* to pray for us in relation to His offering journey? It was in Gethsemane. Luk 22:41-44. Do you see that the Holy Spirit is *joining us* to that *prayer of Christ*, right there in *Gethsemane*?

That is the *Most Holy Place* of the true tabernacle.

Praying by faith in the Holy Spirit, we keep ourselves in the love and fellowship of His offering

Paul wrote about a person who prays in the Spirit. Rom 8:26. As we pray in the Holy Spirit, we are building ourselves up in our most holy faith.

Do you remember where we began? It was with the statement that prayer is speech by faith.

So that we are able to pray by faith in this conversation, the Holy Spirit is enabling us to build ourselves up in that most holy faith.

'But you, beloved [the 'beloved' are those who love God, and are loved by Him because they are born of Him; so Jude was writing to sons of God here], building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit [both these elements - faith, and prayer in the Holy Spirit - are essential to], keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.' Jud 1:20.

There are two elements here: 'keeping ourselves in the love of God' and 'looking for the mercy'.

What does 'looking for' mean? It means that we are 'being illuminated' to *where the mercy is found*.

This is the key point: 'Keeping ourselves in the love of God' means *remaining joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings*.

Remember, 'For God so loved that He *gave His only Son*'. Joh 3:16.

In Galatians Chapter 2, we are told we are to be *co-crucified with Christ*. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.' Gal 2:20.

It is clear that if we are to keep ourselves in the love of God, we are to keep ourselves *in that offering*.

Do you see that prayer is *not* about *alleviating* all of our distresses?

It is about *finding capacity* to *live* in the *midst* of them.

Coming boldly to the throne of grace; Christ, the Mercy Seat

So, 'keep yourselves in the love of God' means remaining joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. The Holy Spirit joins us to Christ's prayer in Gethsemane.

The apostle Peter told us that Jesus was set forth as a 'propitiation' in Gethsemane, which is not a helpful word in explaining the meaning. It means, literally, 'set forth as *the Mercy Seat*'.

So, 'building ourselves up in our most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit' enables us to be joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering. Then we can *see* our connection to the Mercy Seat, which was activated as blood was being *sprinkled* on Him.

So, to 'look for the mercy' means to know how to be joined to Christ, so that the blood that was sprinkled on His body, as the Mercy Seat, is being sprinkled on our heart.

That's where the mercy is. Actually, this is what it means to come 'boldly to the throne of grace'.

The mercy seat was the top part of the ark of the covenant.

Remember that Jesus is in the Most Holy Place of the true tabernacle. He *is* the Ark of the Covenant, and the top piece of the ark of the covenant was called a 'mercy seat'. It was like a throne.

Faith grants an introduction into grace – the basis of prayer

Through prayer, by faith, we 'receive our introduction into grace in which we stand and exult', or rejoice always, in the hope of becoming a son of God.

'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith [another way of translating that is 'we have received an introduction by faith'] into this grace in which we stand.' Rom 5:1-2.

We receive faith by hearing the word.

That faith enables us to *speak*, and what we are understanding is that 'speaking in prayer' is the same as 'standing in the grace'.

Faith is granted as an introduction into the grace, and 'speaking' is rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God. That hope of the glory of God is the hope of your sonship. To 'rejoice' in it means you are *getting* it.

This is both the conversation of praise ascending to the Lord for your sonship; and the conduct of your feet, which is you doing the works of your sonship in Christ.

This is what it means to have received faith and an introduction into grace – this is the basis of your *prayer*.

Your prayer is fundamental to standing in grace as a son of God.

And, when you come to that grace, it is the throne of grace; the Mercy Seat.

Grace is to bind us to the offering of Christ

'Let us therefore come boldly'; we could add to that, '*because* we have received faith'.

'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain *mercy* and find grace to help in time of need.' Heb 4:16.

That grace is not just 'a pick-me-up' to make us feel better. That grace is to *bind us* to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

So, 'building yourselves up in your most holy faith' by praying in the Holy Spirit keeps you, by grace, bound to Christ. That keeps you in the love of God, in which you are obtaining mercy as the blood that was shed on Christ, as He prayed, is being sprinkled on you.

Let's establish this point further.

Christ prayed what we cannot pray because of our other law

In Gethsemane, Christ prayed what we are unable to pray because of the self-centred other law within us.

The mature person understands this point: 'I have another law within me'.

We cannot pray, 'Lord, not my will, but Yours, be done', because the other law within us wants to do our other will, even the 'good' of God.

Rom 7:19. Because it is sourced from us, it is sin. Therefore, we cannot pray that.

Jesus didn't have 'another law'. So, He prayed what *we are unable to pray* because of our self-centred other law within us.

This is what He was praying in the garden of Gethsemane. 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.' Luk 22:42.

So, here is a prayer that *we cannot pray*. But Christ prayed it, and we are to be *joined* to Him.

We are obtaining mercy, which means that we are being bound to Christ, praying in the Spirit, joined to this prayer.

'Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He [began to pray] prayed [even] more earnestly.' Luk 22:43-44.

The capacity of Eternal Spirit to pray

There was a capacity that Jesus received. This is the capacity of Eternal Spirit, by the Holy Spirit, by which He was able to pray even more earnestly.

And what happened when He prayed 'more earnestly'?

His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground. It was bleeding on Him, and it was falling to the ground.

This was the *first* sprinkling of blood on the Mercy Seat.

Cleansed from our self-righteousness by the sprinkling of Christ's blood

The Holy Spirit *enables* us to be joined to Christ, who prayed, 'Not My will, but Yours, be done.'

So the point is that we are *joined to Christ*, and *He* is praying that prayer.

As the blood that was shed on His body, as He prayed more earnestly by the capacity of Eternal Spirit from the Holy Spirit, is *sprinkled* on our hearts, *we* are cleansed from our evil conscience.

What is 'the evil conscience'? It is *the pursuit of our self-righteousness*. It is what we think is 'good' or the way that we think we should pray.

This is why we have to be 'quick to hear' and 'slow to speak' when we come to pray. We are praying 'in weakness', in the Holy Spirit.

He is joining us to Christ, who was praying this prayer even more earnestly by the capacity of Eternal Spirit, and He was beginning to bleed.

As the Spirit joins us to Christ in this prayer, the blood that was shed on Christ is being shed on us.

It is being sprinkled on our evil conscience so that we cease from praying according to our own will.

Joined to Christ deals with the other law

Now, as we have our evil conscience cleansed, we are able to 'priest' ourselves – that means 'present ourselves' – to serve God the Father according to *His will* for us in Christ.

As we are joined to Christ, then, that 'other law propensity' to want to exercise our own will is actually being cut from us in the fellowship of Christ's wound. Our heart is being sprinkled clean.

And we are beginning to pray in a different way from which we would pray in the flesh.

We are now praying *what the Holy Spirit is praying*, because He is praying according to the will of God, and we are praying, by the Spirit, with Christ, *that same prayer*.

When that happens, we are able to know that, in every circumstance of our day, 'all things work together for good [the 'good' of our sonship] to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.' Rom 8:28.

Priesthood capacity belongs to the spiritually mature

This capacity for priesthood belongs to those who are spiritually mature.

Remember that Paul said to the Hebrews, in effect, 'I have a lot to say to you about priesthood, and about Christ's Melchisedek priesthood of which you are to be a participant. But it is hard for Me to say it to you because you have become dull of hearing; because you have become carnal, or immature.' Heb 5:10-11.

Now, because they could not *hear*, they had no faith for participation in this priestly work.

Significantly, they were unable to be delivered from their fleshly conduct and, consequently, remained spiritually immature.

So, that *true prayer* of those who are growing up in Christ is the prayer of *priesthood*.

Prayer is the fundamental basis of our capacity to present ourselves, by the mercies of God, as a living sacrifice, with Christ.

This is the prayer of the mature person, whereas the prayer of the immature person is all about the things that we *think* need to be done.

We join an ongoing conversation with Yahweh

Importantly, and I hope this registers whether you are young in the Lord or whether you have been in the way a long time, the conversation of prayer doesn't *begin* when we start to pray.

Rather, the Holy Spirit is joining us to *the ongoing conversation* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Think about it this way. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not sitting up in heaven waiting for you to get down on your knees and pray, saying, 'Oh, there's Peter - great. We can all start a conversation now.'

Their conversation is *already* happening and, as we pray, we are *joined* by the Spirit to that conversation.

Prayer is not all about 'me'. Prayer is a grace that enables me to *join a fellowship*.

Receiving understanding in prayer

Now, it is important that we know how to 'pray with understanding'. 1Co 14:15.

Praying according to the Spirit does not mean that we never make requests of the Lord.

I have already made the point that we are not to pray carnally, from the basis of our own desires or our own sight as to what we think is good or evil. That would be carnal and immature.

However, we *are* to make our requests made known to God. Php 4:6.

So, how do we ask, or pray, in a manner that is not carnal, or 'amiss'?

'Asking amiss' is asking in relation to our pleasures.

As we have already considered, we accept that we do not know how to pray as we ought, and we pray, in tongues, by the Spirit. This is our beginning point, isn't it?

Paul said, 'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.' 1Co 14:14.

In other words, 'I have no idea what I am saying; what it means. All I know is that, by the capacity of the Holy Spirit, I am praying in the Spirit.'

What is the conclusion, then? Do I spend my whole time praying in the Spirit, and not asking for anything that I can 'put my mouth around'? Is that the conclusion? No, it is not.

Paul said, 'I will pray with the Spirit, *and* I will *also* pray with the understanding.' 1Co 14:15.

It doesn't *begin* with my understanding.

Rather, it begins with me praying in tongues by the Spirit; but I am going to *obtain* understanding.

So, as we continue to pray in the Spirit, waiting on the Lord, we *receive understanding* regarding how we should pray about a matter.

Understanding is the culture of faith

Paul said, 'I am going to pray with the Spirit, and I also pray with the understanding'.

'Praying with the understanding' doesn't mean merely that I 'get it' or that I know exactly what is going to happen through the day.

Remember, understanding is the *culture of offering*.

When I pray in the Spirit, and then I pray with understanding, the understanding is *the conversation and conduct* that comes with *faith*.

To 'pray with understanding' means that I know, by the Spirit, how to walk. Perhaps I do not know *every* decision that I need to make or each way to go. Rather, it means that I know how to conduct myself as one who *lives by offering*.

That is what *understanding* means.

This means that, in all the things that are happening in my day, I am confident in the Lord how to interface with them, so that they are according to the will of God and are resulting in the building up of my sonship.

That is, 'we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, and are called according to His purposes'.

So, all of these Scriptures are saying the same thing. This is what it means to pray with understanding.

So, understanding is the culture of godliness; it is *the conversation and conduct of Yahweh*.

The obedience of prayer – not my will, but Yours, be done

We arrive at understanding because we are ‘quick to hear’ and ‘slow to speak’.

When we pray, we are not to get down on our knees and pray from the basis of our anxieties.

We actually have to take ‘every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’. 2Co 10:5.

What is that obedience? It is ‘Not my will, but Yours be done’.

How do we do that? It is by *praying in the Holy Spirit!*

Praying in the Spirit connects us to a pathway of righteousness

James said, ‘So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, [and] slow to speak.’ Jas 1:19.

So, this hearing and speaking is in fellowship, but it is also *the fellowship of prayer*. ‘Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath’ means, simply, ‘slow to express your emotions’.

We are not to pray in a way that is *driven* by our anxieties or by our desires or by our perception of what is good for us.

To do that would be ‘to be quick to speak’ out of ‘wrath’. ‘Because the wrath of man does *not* produce the righteousness of God.’ Jas 1:20.

Now, the righteousness of God is *you* becoming a son of God, so praying in that way will not produce the righteousness of God.

Praying in the Spirit, where we are quick to hear and slow to speak, waiting for understanding, *connects* us to the pathway we are to walk, by which we become the righteousness of God, in Christ.

Asking according to His will

Now, as we are praying, the Holy Spirit puts it on our spirit so that we ask the Lord, or pray, or conduct ourselves, or converse, *according to His will*. This is a ‘priestly’ work.

We are actually *asking*, petitioning, the Lord, but it is not from the motivations of our flesh.

Rather, we are being *connected to the understanding of the culture of Yahweh* Himself, so that we are asking according to the will of God.

We are making our requests known to God, but we are doing it ‘with understanding’.

So, understanding is not that I understand a point. Rather, understanding is that I *know how* to *participate*. I know what I should be asking in relation to a matter.

Asking in the name of Christ by being in Christ

Now, when we do this, we are actually asking in Christ’s name.

Jesus said, ‘Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.’ Joh 14:13-14.

Many people think that if they ask for something ‘in the name of Christ’, that name is like ‘the magic word’, where ‘Jesus Christ’ is supplemented, or added, to prayer so that they get what they want. That is complete nonsense. To ask in the name of Christ is not to invoke His name as the right to get what you want.

To ask in the name of Christ is to *be in the name of Christ*.

We can ask with understanding only if we are *joined* to the culture of offering, which is the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

Then we are ‘keeping ourself in the love of God’, and obtaining mercy so that we *don’t* ask according to the flesh.

We need to understand that the name of the Lord is ‘holy ground’.

When we come onto that holy ground, we have to ‘take off’ our own ‘gospels’, which are our ‘filthy shoes’, and stop praying out of the ‘muck’ of our own flesh.

We must pray ‘by the Spirit’.

We actually need our ‘feet washed’ so that, as we come onto holy ground, we are praying ‘in Christ’, understanding the culture of offering, and asking in that name, so that the Father is glorified.

How is He glorified? He is glorified by you being the son whom He named you to be.

The Lord listens to our prayer

This is the *culture* of prayer of those who are mature in the Lord - and that is to be all of us.

We are *all* to grow up into this.

Now, when we pray by faith, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit *hear* us. This is amazing, isn't it?

We are joining a conversation that is *already* ongoing and, as we join it by the Spirit, They listen to us.

I don't know about you, but I find it almost overwhelming that I am included in Their conversation, and that They *hear* what I say.

They hear us because we are joined to Their conversation; because we have the same Spirit of faith that each of Them has. There is only *one* faith, Paul said. It is by *that faith* that we join this conversation.

As we receive that faith, by the Spirit, we can be *confident* to participate in the conversation.

Because we have the same faith that They have, our requests are mindful, or consistent with, Their covenant initiative.

We note that this is the nature of the prayer conversations of Abraham, Moses and Daniel. These men had received the faith of the Son that comes by hearing and receiving the word of the covenant. Their prayer was by *this* faith, and God heard them because of their godly fear.

Remember, that statement refers to Christ. 'He was heard because of *His* godly fear.' Heb 5:7. These ones had the same godly fear.

Godly fear is the commitment to remain in obedience to the Father, which is to remain in the fellowship of offering.

Because they had received faith by hearing the word of God's own covenant, their godly fear was to remain connected to that offering, and they were actually heard by the Father as they spoke.

Giving attention to family order

We recall that Abraham interceded on behalf of his nephew, Lot - in fact, on behalf of the whole city of Sodom.

Yahweh had come to Abraham, so this was in the context of a conversation that Yahweh had with Abraham. He came to speak to him. It was the Lord with two others - two angels, we believe.

The Son of God, in the embodiment of Yahweh, came to speak to Abraham concerning his *household*.

This is a key point to note!

If you men, who are heads of houses, do not give attention to *family order in your house*, then your *prayers will be hindered*.

The word, fellowship and breaking bread

Yahweh came to *speak* a word to Abraham about his household, particularly about the conception and birth of his child, Isaac, who was yet to be born.

Abraham had already obtained faith to believe when he looked and saw the stars of heaven. 'He believed, and, it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Gen 15:6.

Having already obtained faith to believe, Abraham invited the fellowship of Yahweh into his house.

We have considered 'the apostles' doctrine', which is the *word* of the covenant.

'The apostles' fellowship' is *the fellowship of Yahweh*, which Abraham then invited into his house. He invited Yahweh and the three men to come into his house.

He prepared a *meal* for them, and said, 'Please, come and stay and eat with me.' They '*broke bread*' - had communion, if you like - in his house. The messengers had come to his house.

A household known and ordered by God, remaining in prayer

Abraham stood aside from them as they ate, and then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him?'

'For I have known him [there was relationship; 'I have known him'], in order that he may command his children and his household after him.' Gen 18:17-19.

Abraham had lifted his face and was meeting Yahweh face to face - 'I have *known him*'.

Abraham was an heir of the grace of life, and Yahweh said, 'Because I have a relationship with Abraham and he receives My word, he does not receive his word from his wife anymore.' He was delivered from that - circumcised, if you like!

'I *know* this man, and because He receives My word, he will command his children' - all of his children are 'children of faith'.

This was an ordered house!

'In order that he may command his children and his household after him that they *keep the way of the Lord* ['Keeping the way of the Lord' is teaching your household to walk in the pathway of the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.]

'To do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has *spoken* to him.' Gen 18:19.

Abraham, being quick to hear and slow to speak, then *engaged in the conversation* where Yahweh Himself was revealing His plan to Abraham.

Now, when Abraham was engaged in this conversation, he was *speaking by faith*, having been firmly established on the other three foundations.

'Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham *still stood* [there] *before the Lord*.' Gen 18:22.

So, God's word was in action. It was going to happen, but Abraham *kept before the Lord in prayer*.

Asking in faith in relation to being connected with the Everlasting Covenant

'And Abraham came near ['coming near' by the Spirit] and *said ...*.'

Can you imagine speaking to Yahweh Himself in this way?

As I have already said, we have to be careful that we don't bring all our own thoughts into our prayer. We have to speak with fear and reverence.

However, Abraham knew that he had been *invited* into this conversation, because he had heard Yahweh speaking among Himself, saying, 'This is what We are going to do.'

'Abraham came near and said, "Would You destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?"

'Far be it from You to do such a thing as this [This sounds like Moses pleading with the Lord not to destroy the Israelites, doesn't it?], to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'" Gen 18:23-25.

That was *faith speaking*, and Yahweh *listened* to him.

So Yahweh said, 'I won't destroy if I find fifty righteous people in Sodom.' Gen 18:26.

And then Abraham continued, 'What about forty-five? What about forty people? What about thirty people? What about twenty people?', right down to 'What about ten people?'

And the Lord said, 'If I find ten believing people in that city, I won't destroy it.' Gen 18:32.

So, we can make our requests known to God, because Abraham was speaking in relation to his connection to the Everlasting Covenant.

Known by the Lord by connection to His prayer

This is the same with Moses, and it was the same with Daniel. The beautiful thing about Daniel is that he had given himself to study, and to understand, what had been proclaimed by the Lord's messenger. He was reading the writings of the prophet Jeremiah.

'In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the real of the Chaldeans – in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

'Then I set my face toward the Lord God to *make request by prayer and supplications*, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.' Dan 9:1-3.

The Lord came and answered, 'Daniel, dearly beloved.' Dan 9:23.

Daniel was clearly known by the Lord because of his connection to this *prayer*.

Now, there is much more to say on this, particularly in relation to 'praying at all times', and we will cover this in the coming sessions. Eph 6:18.

Prayer - a personal conversation with the Lord

I really want to encourage us all: firstly, to be those who *hear the word* that Christ is proclaiming, and to be *diligent, by faith, to pray*. Every person, individually, is to have a personal conversation with the Lord.

And the next point to encourage you with is that we *pray, by the Spirit*, that we put off those things

that are of a carnal, or fleshly, conversation, and to be those who are quick to hear and slow to speak.

We are to be those who pray in the Spirit, building ourselves up in our most holy faith, so that we may be kept by grace in the love of God.

As we are *joined with Christ*, we are *obtaining mercy*.

And that mercy enables us to 'priest' ourselves, every day, all day.

In fact, that is how we 'pray at all times', without ceasing.

It is a very precious subject. Prayer is *fundamental* to us as believers. It is an *invitation* from Yahweh Himself to speak with Him and to be joined with Him.

And it is the means by which we are able to *fulfil the will of God* that has been prepared for us.