



Unit 2: The Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth

Sermon Series Title: Trust His Word

Sermon 3: Pray Believing

Bible Passages: Ephesians 3:17b-19; Psalm 44:23-26; Mark 6:31; Romans 8:26

Background/Context

One of the great hymns of the church, *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, celebrates two of the blessings of knowing and trusting God: “Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.”¹ The short Letter of Jude names these same two blessings—abiding in God’s love today and confidence of eternal life in the future—as goals of the Christian life (see Jude 1:21). How can a Christian experience such strength and hope? The preceding verse tells us how: By building up your faith and by prayer (see Jude 1:20).

Your faith and your prayer life are connected because what you believe will determine the way you pray. Wrong beliefs about who God is, who you are as His child, or how He works will hinder your prayer life. Knowing and acting upon the truth will lead you into the presence of God and the fullness of the Christian life.

Let’s consider four beliefs, four key issues about your relationship with God that will help or hinder your life of prayer. If you get these wrong, prayer will be a burden to you. If you get them right, they will give you the freedom and confidence to “pray constantly” (1 Thess. 5:17).

A. Pray Believing that Jesus Loves You (Eph. 3:17b-19)

You won’t pray if you don’t believe in your heart that God loves you. God is love, but along the way, some of our heart-felt beliefs about God may have been distorted. Parents who always put us down may have led us to believe that God always condemns too. Angry pastors lead some people to believe in an ever-angry God. People who grew up with no one who would listen to them may feel in their hearts that God doesn’t care enough to listen either.

If doubts of God’s love prevent you from praying, then listen to a prayer that Paul made for you. “I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may... know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17b-19). The more you believe in His love for you, the more you will run to His presence to be with Him.

Application Point: What do you feel when you pray—a knot of fear or the embrace of God’s love? Put your name into John 3:16 to make its message personal to you. For me, it would read: “For God loved Ryan in this way: He gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). Put your name into these verses to teach yourself how much God loves you: Psalm 48:9; Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 5:8; 8:38-39; Ephesians 2:4-5; 2 Timothy 1:7; and 1 John 3:1; 4:10; 4:16.

B. Pray Believing that You Can Trust Him with All that Is in Your Heart

(Ps. 44:23-26)

Some of us don't pray because we don't believe that we can trust God with all that is in our hearts. We hide our doubts because we think He expects us to believe no matter what. We don't ask our questions because someone told us that you don't question God. We swallow our anger because we're afraid that anger is a sin. And because we do not trust Him with the truth, we put on a saintly mask and hide our hearts from Him. If praying about all that is in your heart is a struggle for you, listen to this prayer.

"Wake up, LORD! Why are you sleeping?
Get up! Don't reject us forever!
Why do you hide and forget our affliction and oppression?"

Where did I find such a prayer? Psalm 44:23-24. This prayer is holy ground because the psalmist trusts God enough to be honest. You will find new freedom in prayer when you believe that you can trust God with all that is in your heart.

Application Point: What pain or problem are you hiding from God when you pray? He knows about it already. What He wants to know now is that you trust Him enough to bring Him everything that is in your heart. Come out of hiding and pray.

**C. Pray Believing that You Don't Have to Perform to Please Him
(Mark 6:31)**

In Mark 6, Jesus saw his disciples working themselves to the point of exhaustion. We need to take notice of what Jesus did when He saw how tired His followers were (Mark 6:31): "He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest for a while.' For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat."

The disciples of Jesus pleased Him most by spending the time with Him they needed, even if that meant letting some good things go undone for a while.

Some of us have a hard time believing that being with Jesus is more important than being busy for Jesus. Why is this truth so difficult to put into practice? Because some of us feel the need to impress God with how busy and tired we are instead of trusting in His grace alone to make us more like Him. Believe that you don't have to perform to please Christ, and you will take the time to be with him in prayer.

Application Point: If you have a child or grandchild in your life, take some time this week to watch that little one sleep. Do you love that child any less while he or she is getting the rest needed to get up and go again? God loves to see you busy for Him, but He loves you when you're resting too. Trust that love. Stop and take time to pray.

**D. Pray Believing that You Can Begin Where You Are
(Rom. 8:26)**

Some of us don't pray because we don't think we know how. We've listened to pastors who use big seminary words in their prayers and decided that we don't speak God's language. We listen to Christians pray using "churchy" words we don't know or understand. We decide that we don't have what it takes to communicate with God "on His level."

If this feeling has kept you from a life of prayer, I have good news for you. Your heavenly Father does not grade your theological grammar. In fact, he doesn't like prayers which pile up big impressive words (see Matt. 6:7-8). You don't have to speak on His level because He is more than willing to step down to your level. You can start where you are.

And when you do that, you will find that you have a great helper. The Holy Spirit, like a parent who takes a little child to the doctor, expresses our needs perfectly to the Father (Rom. 8:26). When you know that your prayers are precious to God and made perfect by the Holy Spirit, you will come to Him freely in prayer.

Application Point: Where are you in your life of prayer? Do you speak to God freely or do you hesitate to pray because you believe that you don't know how? Go to Him in prayer, knowing that your prayers are precious to Him and that you have the constant help of the Holy Spirit.

ⁱ Chisolm, Thomas O. "Great is Thy Faithfulness," in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), 54.