

*“The Means of Grace: Prayer” Romans 8:26-27 / Luke 21:34-38, 22:39-40 (10/20/24)*

When I was a member of a mega church in South Korea, I liked to attend Friday night worship service. At that time, I did volunteer work at the church as the young adult worship director. I was so busy every Sunday directing the worship service and caring for my team members. I could not spiritually focus on Sunday worship service well. So, I loved to attend the Friday night worship service because I could worship God without busy heart or work.

Another reason why I loved the Friday night worship service was that the service was focused on prayer. After the pastor’s preaching and benediction, any people who wanted could pray at the sanctuary. Even though the service ended around 9:30 at night, more than thousands of people stayed at the sanctuary to do individual prayer. Some people came up to the altar and kneeled or stood to pray. Some people prayed on the pew, and some people went to the corner of the sanctuary to find a quiet place. The church was opened and provided prayer music until the last person left the sanctuary after prayer.

One day, after I finished praying at the Friday worship service, on my way out from the sanctuary, I found a man praying at the back of the sanctuary close to the door. He was praying so seriously and was so focused on his prayer. So, he

probably did not realize that his voice was so loud. I was very curious about what he was praying for. I shouldn't have listened to other people's prayers, but I overheard his prayer. When I heard his prayer, I was so impressed by his prayer. He was praying for peace all over the world and the spreading of the Gospel into the world. Through his prayer, I reflected on myself because I was also praying for the world and spreading the Gospel, but I was not as serious about the prayer for the world as he was. I thanked God for learning one more thing right before I left the sanctuary.

However, just about to leave the sanctuary, he suddenly shouted louder at the last part of the prayer. "God, please give peace to the world and let God's gospel spread throughout the world. So please help our company's products be sold all over the world." I did not know what products his company sold. And I did not know about him at all. He might be the owner of a company that sells products to the world. And the products might be related to the church. However, at that time, I surely knew that he was praying for world peace for his company.

What is prayer? I believe that this man I met at the Friday night worship service was not the only person praying for personal wishes. Many Christians are praying for their wishes. Praying for our wishes is not bad. Praying for wishes is

one of the functions of prayer. It gives us the opportunity to form a relationship with God, like the relationship between parents and children. When children need any help or want to have something, they go to their parents and start to beg for what they need. So, praying for wishes is a very natural thing for humans. However, other religious people who are not Christians also pray for their wishes to their gods. So, praying for wishes is one of the functions of prayer, but it is not a special characteristic of Christians' prayer. Then, why is prayer so important for Christians? What special characteristics does Christian prayer have? What is the prayer for Christians?

Firstly, Christians should pray to God for their wishes. You might ask, "Pastor, did you just say that praying for wishes is not a special thing for Christians?" Yes, praying for wishes seems the same as other religious people. However, while other religion people pray for their blessing, wealth, health, and safety, Christians pray for having God's grace. Wesley said, "According to this, according to the decision of Holy Written, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he has ordained; in using, not in laying them aside. And first, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer. This is the express direction of our Lord himself. In his Sermon upon the Mount,

after explaining at large wherein religion consists, and describing the main branches of it, he adds: ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asks, receives; and he that seeks, finds; and to him that knocks, it shall be opened’ (Matt. 7:7–8). Here we are in the plainest manner directed to ask in order to, or as a means of, receiving; to seek in order to find the grace of God, the pearl of great price; and to knock, to continue asking and seeking, if we would enter into his kingdom.” While people pray for their personal wishes to their gods, we, Christians, pray for the most precious things. We pray to find the grace of God and the kingdom of God. In addition to this prayer, we also pray for others and our personal wishes. So, for Christians, prayer is a way of receiving the grace of God.

Secondly, prayer is a kind of tuning in our spirit. When I play the guitar, if the guitar is not tuned, it cannot make the sound that I want. In today’s Gospel, Jesus said, “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” We should focus on “Be always on the watch, and pray” and “you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” And Jesus also said, “On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” So, Christians should

pray to tune our spirit toward Jesus. When I tune the guitar, if all strings lose their tune, I cannot tune the guitar by itself. I need the piano or tuner to have the guide note. Now, I use the smartphone or tuner for my guitar, but a long time ago, I listened to the guide notes from the piano. We also cannot tune our spirit by ourselves. We need Jesus to tune our spirit. Through prayer, we can tune our spirit to be good instruments of God. And Jesus gives us the guidance to tune our spirit to God's will.

Pray is the way of grace. We can tune our spirits to God through prayer. Then, how can prayer work in our lives? How should we pray?

Firstly, we should pray. Like the Bible, the prayer cannot do anything for us if we do not pray. Knowledge about prayer can give us direction in our prayer life. But, if we do not pray, the knowledge is just knowledge. In today's Gospel, we can see a habit of Jesus. "Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives" and "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him." Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to rest and pray. And on the night he was captured, Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives and prayed. We should pray until it becomes our habit.

Let me talk more about the guitar. When I change the strings for my guitar, I should tune the strings as often as I can because the tension of the strings keeps changing. However, at some point, when the tension of the strings is stable, I just need to tune the guitar when I play the guitar.

I know prayer is not easy. Now, people are busy and do not have time. It is not easy to have some time to pray every day. However, once prayer becomes our habit, we can pray anytime, as usual, which means we can experience God's grace and work every time in our lives.

Secondly, we should rely on the Holy Spirit to pray. In today's Scripture, Paul said, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." We can pray for God's grace and for tuning our spirit according to God's will because the Holy Spirit helps us and intercedes for us.

I know I am a very weak person. Even though I am a pastor, I also have a temptation to skip prayer for many reasons. Sometimes, I skip my daily prayer

because of tiredness, busyness, babies, etc. When I really do not know what I should pray, I try to pray at least a short prayer, ‘Lord, you know everything. I rely on your Holy Spirit. Please be with me and guide me through this day.’ Then, I can feel that the Holy Spirit helps me to experience God’s grace through very small things in my life.

If we are Christians, if we believe in Jesus, we should pray, even though it is hard to do for many reasons. We should rely on the Holy Spirit before we pray with our own strength and thoughts. Prayer is a gift that God gave us. Prayer is the way to experience God’s grace. I hope we can experience God’s grace through prayer this week. May the Holy Spirit help us to live as people of prayer this week. Amen.