
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

LECTURE 12: PRAYER LIFE OF PASTORS

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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Presented in 14 Lectures called
THE BEAUTY OF PRAYER

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Lecture 12

PRAYER LIFE OF PASTORS

Welcome to this lecture number 12 in the series of the Beauty of Prayer.

Now, today we hope to consider the prayer life of pastors, a very practical topic, and I hope also very useful. Many of you men are pastors, but also others who may not be engaged in pastoral work may still profit from this lecture.

So, all Christians are called to pray. “Praying always,” the apostle Paul says. But especially pastors are called to pray. They should be men of prayer. Think of the apostles, what they said in Acts 6:4, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” These two matters should characterize a pastor. This was the task of prophets in the Old Testament, think for instance of Samuel, who says in 1 Samuel 12:23 “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you.” He considered prayer for the people, pastoral prayer, most important.

And so, we already saw before this, in 1 Samuel 7:5, that Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.” That was then prayer in a public setting. But Samuel also knew prayer in a personal setting, that he would pray for the people of God.

And so this is the task of prophets, of apostles. It’s the task of office bearers. A faithful pastor should often be on his knees asking the Lord for grace upon the members of the congregation. We read it many times in God’s Word, how the one prayed for the other. Think of Abraham who prayed for Lot. Moses, he prayed for the people. Job, he prayed for his friends. Aaron stood between the living and the dead; he prayed for the people of God. Daniel prayed for Jerusalem. In Acts 10:9 we read that Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. And in Acts 1:14, “These all continued in prayer and supplication with one accord.” In Acts 12 we read that the church, the early church at Jerusalem, prayed for the release of Peter from prison. Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

And so, the Lord Jesus Himself needed to pray. We find in Mark 1:35: “In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there he prayed.” And in Luke 6:12, we read that the Lord Jesus prayed throughout the night. And also, the apostle Paul prayed extensively for the churches. Don’t you find it also as you read through the Apostolic Epistles that you find so often a reference given to prayer?

1 Corinthians 1:4–5, “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.” So, he was always thanking in his prayer.

Philippians 1:4, Always in every prayer of mine, for you all, making request. And he did this with joy.

And so, Philippians 1:9, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.”

Colossians 1:9, “We... do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

2 Thessalonians 1:11, “Wherefore also we pray always for you.”

Repeatedly we find that the Apostle Paul prayed much for the congregations that were given to his care. So, it's essentially important that those who labor in God's kingdom should be diligent in lifting up intercessory prayer. There's prayer that they need for themselves, prayer for light and grace, but also, intercessory prayer, praying for others around you.

You see, ministers of the Word are also just weak people in themselves. They also have their sins. They need to be reconciled to God. And through their sin they are unfit to proclaim the Word of God. And so, they need to humble themselves before the Lord, asking Him for grace to be faithful to His Word and that they would be enabled to preach and to teach the Word of God. And so, a servant of God needs fresh installments of God's grace to be able to proclaim His Word with love and with zeal. And this is all received in the way of prayer.

So they need to pray for themselves. But besides that, they need to pray for the members of the congregation. Think of the great example of the High Priest in the temple, that he went into the temple with the breastplate, and the 12 engraved names of the 12 tribes of Israel were upon his chest. And so, he stood before the Lord, as it were, praying for the 12 tribes of Israel. And so, let a pastor lay his members before the Lord in prayer.

Also, let office bearers pray for one another. Let ministers pray for one another. It will breed a spirit of love and of harmony.

You know pastors are often very busy in caring for their churches, and they can work hard. But with all their hard labors, they may be doing exactly the wrong thing. We may be neglecting the rich gold mine of praying down God's Spirit to work. We can use an example of a sailing ship. We can man the sails, trim them, tie them down. We can assure that they are of the best quality, and we take care to replace torn sails; but if there's no wind to blow in the sails, what will this benefit us? We need wind in the sails. And the wind starts blowing in the way of prayer.

The great missionary to China, James Hudson Taylor, was very much engaged in prayer. His life is characterized by ardent prayer. He prayed for everything he needed, and the Lord gave him in rich abundance, everything he needed. He prayed especially for the missionaries who were laboring in other parts of China. There were occasions when their lives were in danger because of riots, and then James Hudson Taylor would rise up several times in the night to pray for them, believing that prayer would protect these missionaries.

At another occasion, he prayed for missionaries in the far West of China at a time when riots and violent turmoil were rampant there. Hudson Taylor had not heard of them for a year, but he continued on praying, and he hoped that in spite of all the dangers and hostilities that the Lord was keeping them. And he also continually felt a burden to pray for them. And so he concluded they must still be alive. And the Lord did make all things well. After more than a year, he heard that they were safe and sound.

And so, Hudson Taylor saw the great need that inland China with its millions and millions of people would receive the gospel. And so, he prayed that God would give missionaries, that God would incline the hearts of Christians in the West to support their labors financially, and the Lord gave a bountiful answer to his prayers. He listens to the petitions of His people. He gives them far above what they expect. And at the end of Hudson Taylor's life, due to his labors and prayers, thousands of missionaries and indigenous workers were laboring to proclaim the gospel to the great people of China.

Hudson Taylor realized that faithfulness in the service of the Lord is of great importance. We must be faithful in every aspect of our work, also in the ordinary day to day matters. “A little thing is a little thing” he said, “But faithfulness in a little thing, is a great thing.” And especially he saw the need to be faithful in continual prayer. Repeatedly, he would pray together with his missionary workers. He realized that blessing does not come down because of our diligence, but true blessing comes from God.

James Fraser was another missionary. He labored after Hudson Taylor. James Fraser labored among the Lisu people at the beginning of the 20th Century in west China, and he tried to preach the gospel to them. But it didn't work. It was difficult. Nobody wanted to listen to him. He labored for years without any true blessing upon his

work. And then he found out that solid, lasting missionary work is done on one's knees. James Fraser was faithful in preaching God's Word, but he became increasingly aware that the prayers of God's people called down blessing upon the work. And these prayers can be lifted up by the missionaries themselves, and besides that also by people in the West who are never on the mission field, but who yet continually pray for blessing.

Fraser was convinced that blessing upon missionary work is giving by believing prayer.

And that's exactly what we find repeatedly in the New Testament. We mentioned already the apostle Paul. He also needed people to pray for him. He not only prayed himself, but he repeatedly requested other people to pray for him. Didn't he know that God is Almighty and that God can give whatever is pleasing to Him? Yes, of course the apostle Paul knew that, but yet he wanted people to pray for him.

Romans 15:30, "I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

And Ephesians 6:18-20, "Praying...for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly."

And 2 Thessalonians 3:1, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course."

Hebrews 13:18, "Pray for us."

And so, the apostle Paul believed that the prayers of God's people would cause a blessing upon his labors. Prayer is of utmost importance. And especially office bearers are called to be ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are to go out and proclaim the gospel, "Be ye reconciled to God." And their word should be solemn, as if it was a Word of God Himself. The preaching of a pastor must be a word that if people listen to it, they will be saved, but if they go against it and do not obey, they will perish forever in hell. That's how solemn the work of a pastor is.

In order for a pastor to bring God's Word, there needs to be unction from on high, and that's received in the way of prayer. By prayer, one receives power in his preaching. And so, a pastor who is called to pray must humble himself more than other children of God do. Every pastor must say to himself, 'I have not only sinned against God, and it's not just that I need forgiveness and reconciliation; but because of my sins, I am unqualified, unfit to proclaim this precious gospel. And yet, I am called to perform these duties.'

It's also a fact that indwelling sin will have a more severe impact upon God's servants than upon ordinary children of God. We can think of men like Isaiah, who saw his own inability and corruption. Think of a man like Moses who realized he could not speak, and of Jeremiah that he was too young. They all confessed that they were unable to open their mouths and speak, and yet they had to preach the Word of God. This is very humbling. Maybe you have experienced that too? That you felt your own inadequacy. And so, there needs to be prayer, not just to be right with God and to be led in a Christian life, but also to be enabled to be an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. In your own strength you can never do that.

And so, there needs to be continual prayer, and an office bearer, a pastor, needs fresh installments of God's grace to be able to proclaim His Word with love and zeal.

Let us also look at the practice of such intercessory prayer. When pastors lay the needs of their congregations before the Lord, we should mention our members by name, asking God to bless them. Now this is hard work. It takes time. Sometimes it take more time than you had initially allotted to it; but it's most important. We cannot convert one soul. You know the Lord can do marvelous things working among your people while you are just watching how the Lord is working. There are numerous examples in church history, and it's still happening. The Lord hears prayer; He inclines the hearts of His people. And therefore, pray with expectation because "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).

So, pray therefore with expectation, but also pray with zeal. Pray with the awareness that you are calling upon the greatest and the most real power in existence, Almighty God, Who has promised to be a gracious God and Father to you. It's not that God needs intercessory prayer; He is independent of everything. And yet, as we mentioned earlier, God incorporates the prayers of His people in His plan of salvation. He delights in their prayers and is willing to hear them.

Also, be earnest in your prayers, serious. Take the kingdom of heaven with violence. Think of how Jacob pleaded with God at Peniel in Genesis 32:26, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Think of Daniel who was so earnestly pleading with the Lord. “Oh Lord, hear; oh Lord forgive; oh Lord, hearken and do; defer not for thine own sake, oh my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name” (Daniel 9:19).

Pray also with faith. In Mark 11:24, “Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when you pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Pray with faith, trusting in God’s care.

Pray also as you desire the honor of God’s name. Think of Joshua, how he pleaded in his prayer for the honor of God’s name, “What will thou do unto thy great name?” in Joshua 7:9, and how Moses pleaded in Exodus 32:12, “Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘For mischief did the Lord bring his people out to slay them in the mountains?’”

And then God’s honor is at stake. So, plead for His honor.

In order to pray, holiness is needed, personal holiness. That is, a life closely connected to God. We need to be dependent upon God. And actually, some authors have even said, the conversion of sinners and the well-being of the church depend on the degree of the pastor’s holiness. We find examples in Scripture of holy men who were richly used by the Lord. They were devoted and dedicated to God, and their labors were blessed. Barnabas, Acts 11:24, “he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people were added unto the Lord.”

The love of Christ should live in the heart of the pastor, and as Christ is moved with perishing souls, so the minister will also then have zeal and love for perishing souls. And he will pray and labor and strive in his inner chamber. And there the pastor will plead with God for their conversion. And there the pastor will be warmed in his own soul through the communion with God.

A pastor should be a pious man, a godly man, for a cold, worldly minded pastor is sure to have a cold church. A living pastor will have a church in which life and joy and prayer will abound.

And so, we can find examples that can be given of dedicated holy men, but holy men who yet at times labored under hardship. Yet they had blessing. Think of Isaiah. Isaiah labored, and yet he had to say, “Who hath believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1). And yet, this prophet Isaiah is called the evangelist among the prophets. He has been a tremendous blessing. Nowhere do we find so clearly the Lord Jesus revealed in the Old Testament as in the book of Isaiah. So he met with hardships, yet he was blessed. He was a dedicated, holy man.

And so, a pastor must actually be called to be Christ-like. He must cultivate personal piety. He himself must be in the presence of God. And then, the closet of the pastor becomes a storehouse where he will be replenished. It will be a fountain where he may return to drink. It’s the upper room, where he may commune with the Lord Jesus. There the Holy Spirit will overshadow him. There he will receive grace and strength to do the tasks the Lord lays upon him. There he will become resolved to stand firm in the Lord. It’s in the inner room, in personal prayer, that battles are fought and won, that decisions are made. There he receives unquenchable love for the Lord Jesus and all-absorbing zeal for the glory of God and a love for the prosperity of the church. There he is linked to the inexhaustible resources of God.

A pastor must be a wholly devoted man. What fear is to a soldier, what weakness is to an athlete, what dishonesty would be to a businessman, that is what a low degree of piety will be to a minister. It would be to his dishonor. And no man is more highly honored than a devoted, consistent minister. But none is more despised than he who is faithless and inconsistent. Who can estimate the harm an unholy minister inflicts? His actions, his crimes will be told from east to west. It will be told beyond the seas Proverbs tells us. Its history will be translated into other languages. His bad behavior will be gloated over by the enemy, and nowhere will it be repeated without pain or injury. It will grieve the godly ones. It will encourage others to sin. And that’s all because of the sloppy, sinful conduct of a faithless pastor.

And so, a pastor needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be kept from floundering in God’s service. They should be kept from forsaking their calling, and not a day may pass without a pastor laying his petitions before the Lord, wrestling to receive the mind of Christ, to receive joy in the service of God. And that’s how power will be received in one’s ministry and in one’s official work.

Some pastors claim they are too busy for prayer. Well then, indeed they are too busy. How busy are you really? Can you not find time for prayer? Will we dare plead before the Lord Jesus, before His judgment throne, “Lord we had no time for prayer?” Our daily duties may not overwhelm us so that we would neglect prayer. Look at Scripture, [there are] many examples of men who were exceedingly busy, but they had an extensive prayer life:

Daniel at the court of the king, Nehemiah the same thing, Hezekiah king of Judah, David a man full of labor and wars for the Lord, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Peter, Cornelius. Yet, they were men of prayer.

And there is such blessing connected to intercessory prayer, such a sweetness that you will taste nowhere else. At times it will be a foretaste of heaven itself. To be familiar with the Lord is the sweetest thing here on the earth. It is a great privilege that will provide you with spiritual refinement. There the Lord will show you your deficiencies in your own character, that your own weakness will be revealed to you, and that you will combat these weaknesses.

Great men of God, who were at one time useful for the church, have fallen because of some sin. And as they look back, the reason why they fell into sin [was] because they neglected personal prayer. And they neglected the cultivation of their own soul. And what happens even more often is that if a minister does not fall into a great sin, but yet his preaching becomes dry and dull and lifeless, it's because of the neglect of personal prayer.

And then also ministerial laziness can set in. Because other people don't notice it if you skip personal prayer. They don't see it. And that's a sin frequently happening among pastors. They have so many pressing impulses to get straight to work, and so they postpone that work of personal communion. They think they are too busy, or it's too late, or it's too early. But how dreadful. Let prayer be the characterization of our ministerial work. How many blessings we may have missed through lack of prayer? We can scarcely guess. None of us can know how poor we are in comparison with what we might have been, if we had lived habitually, closer to God in prayer. Vain regrets are now useless. But instead, let there be a resolve to amend our ways of neglect.

We must be men of prayer. We will be men of prayer. Let us strive in prayer. Then our churches and our congregations will be blessed. And we will enjoy the presence of God in our lives. And that is wonderful.

The Lord bless you. Thank you.