

# Sermon – Trinity and Prayer



John 14:6-13, Romans 8:24-27

Someone recently asked me, “If prayer works, how come there’s so much injustice in the world?”



**The trivial prayers she’d heard from some** Christian and the sense that God is so distant and unknowable led her to doubt the whole exercise.

Other times I’ve been asked, “How will *my* prayers ever be heard, after all God is so Holy?”



**Some people don’t think themselves** “good enough” at prayer to be heard; others don’t think themselves “good enough” as people before such a holy God to be heard when they pray.

Others say to me, “There are **so** many needs, what **should** I pray for?”

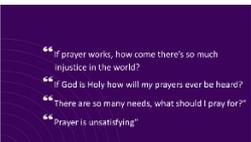


**These people are often overwhelmed** by the **scope** and **scale** of need and want to know if God has a priority list we should use when we pray.



Others still, find prayer **hard**. C.S. Lewis<sup>1</sup> once said “prayer is **irksome**.”

**Maybe you’re someone** for whom prayer is unsatisfying. Lewis was a great Christian indeed, yet he said from personal experience of prayer, “We are reluctant to begin. We are delighted to finish”.



**These are just a few obstacles to praying** I’ve encountered in pastoral conversations. Each has something to do with the **what** and the **how** of prayer.



**But today I want to talk about the who** of prayer.

<sup>1</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christian author

I want to show how knowing God as **Trinity** – the God who is **one**, yet also **three divine persons** of the same essence, power, and eternity – helps us with our practice of prayer.

Knowing **the who of prayer** (to whom we pray) makes a world of difference to the **what** and the **how** of prayer. We find the answer to this question in the Gospel of Jesus.

For example, look at our reading from **John chapter 14**. We see Jesus, on the eve of his trial and execution, telling his disciples about the **who** of prayer. Jesus said...

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” If you know me, you will know my Father also... “...the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.” I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.  
The Gospel of John, chapter 14

‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also...the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.’ (John 14:6,7,12,13)

To those who think God **unknowable and too distant**, see here how God solved that problem for us!

- John wrote at the beginning of his Gospel, “...we beheld [Jesus’] glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father” (John 1:14).
- Here in John 14, Jesus says directly to his followers, “If you know me, you will know my Father also”

These disciples **saw God up close** in Christ, and said, “We **like what we see!**” God **has come near to us** in Jesus Christ and this makes knowing God possible.

To those who wonder if God is just **too holy** and our prayers too **unworthy** to be heard, the Bible tells us the difference knowing the God of the Gospel can make.

“...since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” The Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 10

Speaking of the Son of God, Hebrews 10 says...

'21... since we have a **great priest** over the house of God, 22 let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.' (Hebrews 10:21-22)

The Apostle Paul adds to this, saying in Colossians chapter 1...

'...[you] were once far away from God... Yet now God has reconciled you... through the death of Christ... As a result, you have been brought into God's presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault...'  
The Letter to the Colossians, chapter 1:21-23

**\*\* ...too Holy**

'...through the death of Christ... [God] has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.' (see Colossians 1:21-23 NLT)

If you are someone who thinks God **too holy** to listen to your meagre prayers, or you think yourself **too flawed** to get a hearing, God the Son has **bridged that gap** for you. Through faith in the crucified Christ, God offers us the gift of righteousness we need to **approach God** and be **welcome** in God's presence.

To those who find prayer too **"irksome"** or too **hard** or **unsatisfying**, knowing God as Trinity offers a new motivation! The Letter to the Romans shows how the **third divine person** of the Trinity acts as **our helper** in prayer. Paul writes...

<sup>26</sup>...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.'  
The Letter to the Romans, chapter 8

**\*\* ...too unsatisfying**

<sup>26</sup>...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for [us] according to the will of God' (Romans 8:26-27)

The **Holy Spirit**, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, works **with us** and **for us** in our prayers. Even when we have **no words** (or sighs too deep for words) God reaches into our hearts to understand and commune with our prayers.

To those too **overwhelmed by the scope and scale** of what to pray for, knowing God as Trinity offers you a different way of looking at prayer. Look again at John 14. Jesus says...



‘I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son’ (John 14:13).

Notice that the scope here has both **breadth** and **limitation**...

- It is “whatever you ask,” and
- It is also “ask in My name.”

In the ancient world, “In the name of” referred to “representing the whole person”. In our world someone can sign their name and you can act on their behalf. But to do so, presumes that you will act in a way consistent with who signed the agreement.

Here, Jesus invites his followers to know Him, and so then to know God. The more we know God, the more our prayers will fall into line with God’s purposes.

Personal petitions are not the primary focus, except as far as they are for the glory of God. And requests in prayer presented to God in ignorance might be best answered **when they are not granted**.

Tim Keller says in his book on prayer,



“God gives us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knows. Our Heavenly Father is good, and is committed to our ultimate good. For the sake of our ultimate good, we may be bruised in the short term. God doesn't give us what we want, but gives us what is good.”

We commonly attach to our prayers the words, “**through Jesus Christ our Lord**.” But we do not always bear in mind that this implies an **absolute self-sacrifice**. When we do, we are praying that our prayers may not be answered except in so far as they **advance the purposes God** has best in mind (as implied in Romans 8:28a).

This takes prayer out of the realm of magic, or technique, or self-interest and puts it firmly in the realm of **faith** and **relationship**.

When we pray, **we are putting our trust in one we've come to know**. John Calvin<sup>2</sup>, said,

'Prayer is the chief exercise of faith... the true proof of faith is the assurance that when we pray God will really perform what God has promised us...'



Coming to know **who God is through the Gospel** – the God who is **one**, yet **three** divine persons – really impacts our understanding of prayer.

- If God seems too **far away** and unknowable, the Son of God has come near.
- If **imperfection before God's holiness** is your worry, God has offered us a new standing through grace shown to us in the cross of Christ.
- If you find prayer **too hard** or too unsatisfying, God the Holy Spirit is alongside eager to assist.
- If you're overwhelmed by **all the concerns** to pray for, Jesus eases the pressure, calling us to **hand over huge issues** into the hands of an all-knowing, trustworthy Heavenly Father.

Knowing God as Triune offers us...

- the way spiritually and meaningfully to **know God**,
- confidence to **come into the presence** of the living **God**,
- help to make a **real spiritual connection**, and
- **faith** to put the concerns of life into God's trustworthy hands

**There's even a Trinitarian shape to prayer**. It's sometimes evident in the New Testament, such as in The Letter to the Ephesians where there's even a **bullet point approach** capturing all I've been saying in today's message.

Ephesians 2:18 assures Christians...

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<sup>2</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Century European reformer and theologian



‘For through him [Jesus Christ] we both [all believers] through him... have access in one Spirit to the Father.’

We can approach God, by the Spirit through the Son, and we have access to the Father.



Paul even goes on to pray a prayer for the Church in that Trinitarian fashion in chapter 3. Let me conclude with it today as a prayer for us all, saying...

‘[Because of the Gospel] I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with [all believers], what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God’ (Ephesians 3:14-19)

The “who” and the “why” of prayer is perfectly displayed in these words. My encouragement to you is, if you we begin with the “who” and the “why” of prayer, the “how” and the “what” will flow easily as you keep looking to the Scriptures as your guide.

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