

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #56, Lord's Day 45*

## The Prayer of the Christian



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

## **John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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*Sermon #56 Lord's Day 45*

**The Prayer  
of the Christian**

*Matthew 6, verses 9 to 13, and Luke 11, verses 2 to 4*  
**Questions and Answers #116 thru #119**

**i. Introduction**

- 1. Why We Must Pray**
- 2. How We Must Pray**
- 3. What We Must Pray**

**Introduction**

Beloved congregation, thus far, we have seen that a life in conformity to God's revealed will is the manner in which the Christian expresses his gratitude to God for having delivered him or her in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, God's redeemed people, redeemed by Christ, desire to live in obedience to Christ. And so, those that come to Christ, by the grace of God and by the work of the Holy Spirit, also desire to become like Christ. Or, to put it very simply, is that justification and sanctification are two inseparable graces. Justification is the sovereign act by which it pleases God to declare a man righteous on the basis of the finished and accomplished work of Christ. But that blessing produces a sanctified and godly life. And so, we could put it this way, that one cannot claim to be a Christian, unless, by grace, he endeavors to live the life of a Christian, because they belong inseparably together. Anyone, as John says, who claims to know Him, and does not, in his life, by grace, endeavor to honor his Word, is a liar and is self-deceived. And so, the Heidelberg Catechism, therefore, correctly has focused on the Ten Commandments. Because, as Christians, as the people of God, and by the grace God, we belong to the people of God, we endeavor to be obedient not to earn God's favor; we are not saved by works. But we endeavor, by grace, to express our gratitude for God's grace towards us, by living in obedience to his Word. And that is, that is the desire of every true Christian. The desire of a true Christian is, Oh, that my ways were directed to keep thy precepts (Psalm 119:5).

And that brings us to the subject for this evening, because the Christian whose desire it is to honor God by honoring his Word, by honoring his revealed will set before us in the Ten Commandments, realizes, often painfully, that they cannot succeed in their own strength. So, the genuine Christian, therefore, will also be a man or a woman, boy or girl of prayer. And so, the Heidelberg Catechism now concludes by focusing on this very essential component of the Christian life. So, if we look at Lord's Days 34 through 52, which is a significant portion of the Heidelberg Catechism, we could say that the Christian life consists of two components. And boys and girls, I'm going to use two words with a "P"—*Precept and Prayer*. First, the unfolding of God's revealed will, and then, the Christian's life of prayer, which is so essential for the Christian life. Because every true Christian recognizes day after day that without the grace of God, they cannot live what they are called to be, and to live a Christ-like life.

And so, we're going to begin our consideration of prayer by way of Lord's Day 45, an introductory Lord's Day to the exposition of the so-called Lord's Prayer, which is really the disciples' prayer. So turn with me to Lord's Day 45 of our Heidelberg Catechism. And there we read in,

Question #116: *Why is prayer necessary for Christians?*

The Answer is: *Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us; and also, because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them.*

Question #117: *What are the requisites of that prayer which is acceptable to God and which He will hear?*

The Answer is: *First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, who hath manifested Himself in His Word, for all things He hath commanded us to ask of Him; secondly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty; thirdly, that we be fully persuaded that He, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised us in His Word.*

Question #118: *What hath God commanded us to ask of Him?*

And the Answer is: *All things necessary for soul and body, which Christ our Lord has comprised in that prayer He Himself has taught us.*

Question #119: *What are the words of that prayer?*

And then, follows the prayer which we have just read to you from Matthew 6, and from Luke 11.

*"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."*

And so, the simple topic of this Lord's Day is *The Prayer of the Christian*. It doesn't just say, "Why is prayer necessary?" It says, *Why is prayer necessary for Christians?* And first of all, we're going to look at the "Why" of prayer, why we have to pray, or we could say, the necessity of prayer. Secondly, "How" we are to pray, or the requisites. What are the biblical standards, the biblical requisites for a prayer that is pleasing to God? And thirdly, the substance of prayer, and that, of course, is set forth in Questions and Answers #118 and #119, and then, of course, the focus will be on that wonderful paradigm that Christ has given us, which we know as "The Lord's Prayer," which is actually the disciples' prayer. So, first, *The Prayer of the Christian; Why We Must Pray; How We Must Pray; and What We Must Pray.*

## 1. Why We Must Pray

First of all, the necessity of prayer. And congregation, prayer, in all of its simplicity, is communion and fellowship with God. God created us in that manner. As you know, we often refer to it, that an essential part of the day for Adam and Eve before they fell were those special times of communion and fellowship with God. And congregation, what a joyful time that must have been, when God would meet with our first parents, and when God would communicate his love to them, and they would respond in expressing their love for him. And we know that, when sin came, that blessed communion, that blessed fellowship between God and man was broken and interrupted. And Adam, rather than being where he should have been, where he had been every morning and evening before that, was now hiding, and no longer had any desire to commune with his Maker. And what a miracle it was the God sought him out, that God brought him out of hiding, and though Adam no longer had any desire to commune with his Maker, it was obviously God's desire still to communicate with Adam, and he spoke to him. And congregation, it remains our obligation, as human beings, to commune with our Maker. That requirement is an unchangeable requirement. And the grievous thing is that by nature, the natural man has no desire for such things.

But tonight, we're focusing not on man in general, because ultimately it is the duty of all human beings to see God's face, and in Luke 18, verse 1, we read, "Men ought always to pray." But the specific focus of this Lord's Day is on *The Prayer of the Christian*. It does not just say, "Why is prayer necessary for all men?" it says specifically, *Why is prayer necessary for the Christian?*—implying, of course, by that Question, that prayer is a very essential component of the life of the Christian. A Christian cannot function, a Christian cannot prosper spiritually, unless we are a people of prayer. That's one of the remarkable things that happens, when it pleases God to regenerate a sinner dead in sins and trespasses, when God, by his Spirit, makes a sinner alive, and when that happens, that new spiritual creature begins to breathe. That's why prayer has been called *the breath of the spiritual life*. So the well-known author, Arthur Pink,<sup>1</sup> puts it this way: he says, "The moment a spiritual babe is born in the new creation, it sends up a cry of helpless dependence towards the source of its birth."

And so what that simply means is when, by the mighty work of God's Spirit, when divine life is brought into our hearts, the life that proceeds from God will be drawn to God, will be attracted to God. And that's why, when Jesus sends Ananias to visit Saul of Tarsus in the street that is called Straight (Acts chapter 9), where he had been for three days not eating and drinking, Christ remarkably summarizes what has happened to Saul of Tarsus, the proud Pharisee, by simply saying—because you know, Ananias was very concerned that this was not genuine—and then Christ said, "Behold, he prayeth" (verse 11). Saul of Tarsus, a proud and mighty Pharisee, who, no doubt, many times had prayed, just like the Pharisee in the temple, proud of who he was, boasting of his accomplishment (Luke 18:9–14). For the first time in his life, he began to pray.

That's why prayer has rightly been called—no doubt you've heard it before—prayer has been called *the breath of Spiritual life*. What does that simply mean? It simply means this, that in natural life we cannot live without breathing. It's a great trial for people when, medically, their condition is such that they're having breathing difficulties. Because in order for us to function properly, we need to be able to breathe. And so it is with spiritual life. True spiritual life cannot function without prayer. Prayer is the breath of spiritual life. Prayer is therefore absolutely necessary for

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, aka A. W. Pink (1886–1952) was an English Independent Baptist who attended the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago in 1910, and pastored churches in Colorado and Kentucky. Through his studies he became increasingly Calvinistic, and retired from the ministry to write many books promoting that view. He retired to England in 1934, ending his days in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, in Scotland.

the Christian. The Christian cannot make it; the Christian cannot flourish; the Christian cannot be fruitful; the Christian cannot live a God-honoring life, unless they are a people of prayer.

But what should be noted here immediately is how this Answer of the Catechism begins: *Why is prayer necessary for Christians?* And perhaps, boys and girls, you could make a long list of all the things that we ought to be praying about. And we may make all of our needs known to God, that's for sure. We read that from Luke 11, where Christ gives this powerful example. He said, "What father would give a scorpion to his son if he asks him for a fish? How much more will not your heavenly Father give you what you need?" (verse 11). And yet the Answer of the Catechism is very instructive because it says, *Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us.* And so, what that highlights, congregation, is that prayer is not, in the first place, a means whereby I make known my needs to God, which I certainly may, and we will get to that. But true prayer is, in the first place, an act of worship. True prayer is a prayer where we, first of all, focus on who God is, and we worship him for who he is, as we will see in Lord's Days 46 and 47 that follows. That's why Christ taught his disciples and us that when we pray, we're not to begin by focusing on ourselves; we're not to begin by focusing on our needs; but we must begin by focusing on the God to whom we speak, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9). That's how our prayers must begin.

And how profitable for us it is to realize that. Far too often—I've been guilty of it myself—far too often, we begin with ourselves. We focus on our needs. We focus on our condition. But Christ is saying, when you pray, you must first of all, worship. You must first of all focus on the God whom you are addressing. You must, first of all, you must hallow his name. Psalm 50, verses 14 and 15, says that very clearly. It says, "Offer unto God thanksgiving"—that's another way of saying, worship God—"and pay thy vows unto the most High...call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

So, first of all, *Prayer is an act of Worship.* Prayer is that act whereby a human being again begins to function as God created us. True prayer, true prayer that comes forth from a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, that has been transformed by the power of God's Spirit; true prayer is a restoration of what God established in paradise.

Secondly, it says here, *And also, because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them—Because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit—*so immediately highlighting what it is that we should desire; what it is that we should ask for, after we have honored God, after we have honored his name, after we have hallowed him, after we have focused on who he is, what is it that we should desire of him, what is it that the Christian needs? Well, the Christian needs God's grace, and the Christian needs the Holy Spirit. Why? Because it is the true Christian's desire to live a God-glorifying and God-honoring life. And the true Christian discovers, sometimes painfully, that they cannot succeed without the grace of God, that they cannot succeed without the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And so, the Christian who wants to be a godly husband, needs the grace, needs grace and the Holy Spirit to enable him to be a godly husband. The woman who desires to be a godly wife, needs the grace of God and the Holy Spirit, to be a godly wife. The child that wishes to live as a godly child, honoring his or her parents, needs the grace of God and the Holy Spirit to be a godly child. The man who desires to be a godly employer needs the grace of God and the Holy Spirit to be a godly employer. The person who desires to be a godly employee needs the grace of God and the Holy Spirit to be a godly employee. Because ultimately, that's where our godliness has to manifest itself. Our godliness has to manifest itself primarily in those spheres of life in which God has sovereignly placed us.

That's why, congregation, I say it again, that's why true godliness, Christianity begins at home. Christianity begins in our marriage, in our families. That's the litmus test—are we godly at home? Am I a godly husband? Am I a godly wife? Am I a godly child? Am I a godly employer or employee? Or whatever the sphere of life is in which you are. And the true Christian understands that. The true Christian understands that God calls me to be a man or woman, boy or girl that honors Him precisely where he has planted me, precisely in that environment in which he has sovereignly placed us. That's why, as I already said, the prayer of the godly husband, wife, a child, employer, employee, whatever it may be, the prayer of the true Christian is this, after he confesses, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precept diligently" (Psalm 119:4). You see, that's the understanding of a godly person. A godly person understands that our obligation is to keep God's precepts diligently. But the godly person also understands how often we come short of keeping his precepts diligently, and that's why the psalmist also follows with that remarkable petition, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" (Psalm 119:5).

Congregation, do you understand this? Do you understand that your greatest need is the grace of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enable you to live a God-glorifying life, which is your sacred calling. We are to do so, it says here, *With sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them*. Because, you see, prayer is God's ordained way by which it pleases him to bestow these blessings upon us. And of course, we read from Matthew 6, that our heavenly Father already knows what we need, before we have even asked him (verse 8). And yet it is his ordained way that we would make our need known to him. Because also by means of prayer, God wants to teach us that we are dependent upon him, that without him, we can do nothing, that without him, we can accomplish nothing.

And so, our prayer is to be sincere—without hypocrisy. That's why I want to emphasize again that the prayer life of the Christian functions primarily in secret, primarily in the closet. The true Christian cannot live without the closet. We read it again from Matthew 6. Christ says, go, enter your closet and shut the door; shut out everything that would distract you, and make your needs known to your heavenly Father who knows what you have need of before you even ask him (verse 6). The true Christian cannot breathe spiritually unless there is that quiet place where we can be all alone with God. You see, that's the difference between the Christian and the hypocrite. The hypocrite can, perhaps, pray very eloquently in public. But the prayer life of the Christian, the prayer life of God's children takes place in the closet. Congregation, I ask you again, do you have a closet? Do you have a place where you can be all alone with God, where the only one who hears you is the most High? Because, you see, when we're alone with God in our closet, there is no room for pretext. When we're all alone in our closet, we are in the presence of the God before whom all things are open. And yet, for the true Christian, that knowledge that God knows everything is so immensely comforting. Because, often, in our closet, we don't quite know how to order our prayers. Sometimes we can struggle greatly and we don't know how to order our petitions. Oh, the comforting knowledge of knowing that when I pour out my heart, even though my prayers and my petitions come out backwards, that my heavenly Father hears me, and is so pleased when I seek him in secret. So we are to do so sincerely, it says here.

We are to do so *continually*—"without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Now, I want to make sure we have not misunderstood. Without ceasing does not mean that you are praying twenty-four/seven.<sup>2</sup> That's not what that means. Obviously, we have our obligations, we have our duties to fulfill, we have our employments. But what that means is that for the true Christian, his mindset will always be a prayerful mindset. That means that a Christian will pray throughout the day, not

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<sup>2</sup> Twenty-four/seven, means for twenty-four hours seven days a week.

only when we are alone in our closet, but when we are at work, when we are seeking to fulfill our obligations. And sometimes those prayers can be very short. Sometimes it can merely be, “Lord, help me please. Help me to deal with this.” But for the true Christian, there will be this prayerful disposition. And what a blessing it is when we may so walk with God that, throughout the day, precisely when we are engaged in the responsibilities that God calls us to, that we have a prayerful life; that we pray without ceasing.

We are to do so, it says, *gratefully*. That means thanksgiving must be a part of true prayer. Thanksgiving for the countless blessings that God bestows upon us. How profitable it is, when we are in our closet, or when we seek God’s face together with our spouses and our children, how profitable it is to reflect on all the blessings that God bestows upon us. And so, Wilhelmus á Brakel,<sup>3</sup> in his chapter on prayer, he says the following, a very simple directive, he says, “Take note”—write down—“all the things you pray for, and then take note how often those petitions are answered.” And so, when you pray together in the morning, alone in your closet, and together as a family, and you ask for God’s blessing upon that day; you ask for protection; you ask for grace and wisdom to engage in what God calls you to do; then when you retire at night, and you reflect on that day, and you realize that God granted everything you asked for that morning, you’ll be astonished how many prayers are answered. And so, thanksgiving is an essential component of prayer. That’s why Christ will teach us that we must begin with worship. We must begin with hallowing God’s name. The focus should not be first of all on us, but the focus should be on God.

## 2. How We Must Pray

Let’s go to our second point, Question #117. We’ve talked about why we should pray, secondly, *What are the requisites of that prayer which is acceptable to God and which He will hear?* So in other words, the implication of this Question is, there is such as prayer that is not acceptable to God. There is a worship that is not acceptable to God. Obviously, it should be a matter of great concern for a Christian to know that I am ordering my prayers in a manner that pleases God, in a manner that is consistent with his Word. Let me give you two biblical examples.

The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu—no sooner had God shown his approval of the tabernacle and of the whole sacrificial system, by answering with fire, after Moses had clearly instructed the sons of Aaron as to what God’s will was in order to enter into his presence, what did they do? They ignored God’s precept. Instead of taking fire from the altar of burnt offering where it was supposed to come from, where the sacrifice was made, and bringing it into the sanctuary, bringing it to the altar of incense; they thought, “We will do it our own way,” and they brought in strange fire, fire that did not come from the altar. And you know what happened, they were struck dead (Leviticus chapter 10). And that may seem like a very dramatic response, but what that story teaches us is how greatly offended God is when we bypass his ordained way. What God was teaching the people of Israel was that, because they were a sinful people, that the only way they could come into his presence in a manner that was pleasing to him was in connection with the altar where the blood of the sacrifice was shed. And they were stricken, and they perished.

I also think of the well-known story that our boys and girls know so well, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. That parable begins remarkably this way. Two men went to the temple to pray. And then Jesus unpacks for us how the Pharisee prayed and how the publican prayed. It’s very clear from that story, that what the Pharisee was doing was an utter abomination in the ears of God. It was a prayer that was utterly displeasing to him. The Pharisee thought highly of himself.

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3 Wilhelmus á Brakel (1635–1811), aka “Father Brakel”, was a Protestant Reformed minister and theologian in the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, famous for his 4 volumes, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*.

There was no worship; there was no acknowledgment of who he was before God. Instead, he boasted of who he was, and he reminded God of all the wonderful things that he had done for him. Then there's the publican who did not even dare to lift up his eyes, who came into the court of the temple, painfully aware of who he was in God's sight, painfully aware of his sinnership. And all he could say was "O God"—he begins with God, even in that short prayer—"O God, be merciful to me, a sinner"—O God, be propitious to me, a sinner. That man understood that apart from that bloody sacrifice that was still being performed in the temple every day, that apart from that bloody sacrifice, there was no hope for him. And so, in that short prayer, he first of all honors God's name: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18:9–14).

And so, Question #117 is a very important Question therefore. The Catechism Answers by saying, *First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, who hath manifested Himself in His Word, for all things He hath commanded us to ask of him.* So we are to pray from the heart, again emphasizing that a prayer that is pleasing to God must be pleasing to God by his standards. And what this highlights is that God knows me, he knows you, he knows our heart. And true prayer, the true prayer of the Christian will come from the heart. Because the prayer of the Christian will be an expression of what lives in the heart, even in the times we are in great conflict and in great strife. But it must proceed from the heart. We read in Psalm 145, verse 18, "The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that all upon him in truth."

And again, that's what happens in the closet. Because in the closet, when no one sees us but God, when no one hears us with God, there can be no pretense. There can be no pretense. When we are in the presence of people, then, we are in danger of being Pharisaical. When we are in the presence of people, those of us who are called upon to offer public prayer, the great temptation always is to aim our prayers at the ears of men rather than at the ears of God. But there's no such thing in the closet. That's why I said, the prayer life of the Christian is primarily private. It must proceed from the heart. John 4, verse 23, "The true worshippers," Christ says, "shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth:"—and then this wonderful statement—"for the Father seeketh such to worship him"—seeketh such to worship him.

And it says here, we are to address God as he has *manifested Himself in His Word.* So we are to make sure that our prayers are informed by Scripture; that our prayers are consistent with the Word of God; that we are addressing the God who has revealed himself in his Word, and especially in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, when God created Adam and Eve, what was their worship? What was their response, as God revealed himself to them? God opened his heart to them, and they responded to what God had revealed to them. So, their response, their worship was an echo of what they had heard God say to them. That's what our prayers should be. We need to pray scripturally. That's why, as Christians, we need to be diligent students of the Word; so diligent that when we do pray, when we all upon God's name, that our prayers will be formed by the very Word of God.

Congregation, it so pleases God when, in our prayer, he hears the echo of his own Word. That's why it has been a good practice of Christians throughout the ages to actually pray the Psalms. Most of the Psalms are prayers. And how precious are those Psalms! And there are those times in the life of the Christian, that we can be in such spiritual bondage, that we can experience such spiritual conflict that we do not even know what to pray, we don't even know how to order our prayers. I can tell you from personal experience, at such a time, you need to turn to the Psalms. Find a Psalm that expresses what you are not able to say. And I think that's a wonderful spiritual practice, to pray the Psalms, to let the Psalms inform your prayers. But the point is this, that our prayer life must be an echo of the Word of God.

*Secondly*, it says, *that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery*. In other words, when we come into the presence of God, we need to be fully conscious of who we are. We need to realize, I am come into the presence of God, I am a sinner. We must recognize who we are and remain. We must recognize that we are sinners, that there's nothing in us that can qualify us for God's favor. And that's quickly said, but it's a hard lesson to learn. Because, congregation, even God's children have this wretched tendency that secretly, somehow, we try to find something in ourselves that makes us acceptable to God. This is saying we need to come before God the way we are. And that means we have nothing to offer him—nothing to offer him. We must rightly and thoroughly understand who we are so that we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of God, and realize that truly, we are not worthy of the least of his benefits.

And again, sometimes we say that so quickly, but congregation, do you believe that? Do you really believe that when you bow your knees, when I bow my knees? Do you really believe that you are not worthy of the least of God's mercies? As sinners, we have absolutely nothing to show forth. So we need to come and humble ourselves deeply when we appear in his presence. Abraham felt that when he met with God, and looked over the valley and saw Sodom and Gomorrah. And this time Abraham knew who he was dealing with. He said, "Behold now, I have taken it upon me to speak unto the LORD, which am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). That's how he felt, in the presence of God's greatness, in the presence of his majesty and his holiness, he said, "I am nothing but dust and ashes in thy sight." That's not a false humility, that was genuine. And you see, what the Catechism is saying, in order for us to pray a prayer that's pleasing to God, a prayer in which we rely alone on Christ, we need to come before God and recognize who we are. Isaiah 66, verse 2, this beautiful verse where God says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." We recognize the three first Beatitudes in there: poor in spirit, mourning, and meekness. "But to this man will I look even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

*Thirdly*, it says, *that we be fully persuaded that He*—this is beautiful—*notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised*. So, boys and girls, there's a reason why we end our prayers with the simple words, "For Jesus' sake." When we end our prayers with those words, we are confessing before God "There is nothing in my prayer, not in the manner in which I said it, not in my eloquence or whatever, there's nothing in my prayer that qualifies me to be heard of God, except when I offer my prayer in Christ's name—for Jesus' sake." And yet, that is so enormously comforting, congregation. That's why it says here, *That we be fully persuaded*—though I am *unworthy of it*—that God will hear my prayer, not because of the length of my prayer, not because of my eloquence, not because of the tears I shed, not because of my emotions, but he will hear my prayer *for the sake of Christ our Lord*.

You know, the saints of the Old Testament, too, they understood that. Psalm 143, verse 1, "In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness." Listen to how Daniel ends his prayer, this remarkable man of God, a man of prayer, who prayed three times a day, and who would rather have died than not pray. "Now therefore," he says, "O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications" (Daniel 9:17). Then, this powerful phrase, "For we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies" (verse 18). There was a godly man who knew he had nothing, nothing to show forth, and who rested entirely in the mercy of God. "O," he says, before thee, we present our supplications, not for our righteousnesses, because we have none; "but for thy great mercies." That's why Jesus has taught his people that we must pray in his name. In John 14, verse 13, he says, "And whatsoever you ask in my name, that will I do,

that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” First John 5, verse 14, John writes, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”

And so that means that true prayer is an exercise of faith. When I end my prayer with these simple words, “For Christ’s sake,” “For the sake of thy beloved Son,” I am thereby confessing that my only hope is in that Christ; that it is only for Christ’s sake that God can hear my poor and feeble petitions. Oh, how enormously comforting that is, to know that God hears the needy when they cry. He even hears the ravens when they cry. How encouraging is that? Here is an unclean animal, a raven, an animal that feeds on carrion, an animal that only makes the same ugly sound over and over again. And God says, I even hear the ravens when they cry (Psalm 147:9). Then most certainly he hears the cries, and the groanings of his people, when we present our petitions in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **3. What We Must Pray**

And then, finally, the substance of prayer, we have no time to unpack it, but that will follow. It says—what are we to pray for?—*All things necessary for soul and body*. So that means we are to acknowledge God in all of our ways. That’s a mark of godliness, a mark of spiritual growth it is, that the Christian more and more lives in dependency upon God; that the Christian will acknowledge God for even the smallest details of his life, acknowledge him in all of your ways (Proverbs 3:6). But notice the order of the Answer, *All things necessary for soul and body*. And of course, that is because what follows is the Lord’s Prayer. And as you know, the first three petitions the focus is not on us, the focus is on God: “Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done” (Matthew 6:9–10). And then follow our needs: daily bread, forgiveness of sins, and to be kept and protected from temptation and from sin.

So there, it says, *All things necessary for soul and body, which Christ our Lord has comprised in that prayer He Himself has taught us*. That’s why the exposition of the Lord’s Prayer is so helpful. Because, congregation, that’s the pattern Christ has given us. That’s the paradigm. And for myself, too, I have found it so helpful, when I’m alone in my closet, when I order my petitions according to that paradigm. It doesn’t mean that I have to repeat it word for word, but order your petitions according to that framework that Christ has given us. That’s why it’s actually the disciples’ prayer. It’s the template that Christ gives us on how we are to order our prayer.

And so, let’s wrap this up for tonight. And the question for me and you is, am I, are you a person of prayer? Is prayer the breath of your life? It’s been said that if you want to embarrass the Christian is ask him how his prayer, or her prayer life is. What an indictment it is against us. But you know what, a true Christian will realize how deficient our prayer life often is. Because, you see, what it is when we pray, we engage in a spiritual exercise, that everything seems to conspire against it. That’s why Jesus said you need to find a place alone, you need to find a closet, you need to shut the door, you need to be alone with God to seek his face. That’s why I recommend, I recommend to do that in the morning, to do that before the day starts, whether you are an evening or a morning person, but to begin your day with God, alone with God to seek his face. What a comfort it is that God gives us the grace to pray. We may pray what the disciples prayed, “Lord teach me how to pray,” and how graciously he will answer that request. This is the God who says, “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Psalm 81:10). Amen.

### **Let’s pray.**

Gracious God in heaven, how worthy thou art that we should seek thy face also at this moment, to hallow thy name, to hallow thee, to honor thee for who thou art, in Christ. And what a miracle

it is that we sinners may come to thee in his precious name; that we may know that when we seek thy face and call upon thee in this name, that thou wilt hear our feeble and deficient petitions. Lord, may that encourage us, and may we examine our own hearts, the condition of our spiritual life. And oh, Lord, give us a grace to be a people of prayer; that we would recognize each and every day that we need thy grace and the Holy Spirit in order to be what we are called to be; and that thou art a God who has promised that if we open our mouths widely unto thee, that thou wilt grant that which we request, especially when our prayers are in conformity to thy revealed will. And so, heavenly Father, we ask the petition that the disciples asked of Jesus, teach us to how to pray. Go with us as we depart from here. We ask for thy blessing upon the gathering of our young people as we continue our study of the book of James. Go with us into this coming week. Gather with us again on the coming Lord's Day, and graciously pardon our sins, for Christ's sake alone. Amen.