

Making Prayer Your Second Language

“Praying In Jesus’ Name”

John 15:5-7

Gutten Tag! Vie gehts? Ich spreche ein bisschen Deutsche. Did you get all of that? Do we need an interpreter? I said in German, *“Good day. How are you? I speak a little bit of German.”*

For the better part of two years, five days a week, one hour each day, I studied German. My teacher was convinced that if we learned how to speak in the German language then it would be much easier for us to learn how to read and write it. So for the better part of two years, five days a week, an hour each day, I worked hard at trying to learn how to speak the German language.

Apart from a few other little phrases, what I’ve shared with you this morning pretty much in capsules my proficiency in speaking the German language. I can say, *“Good day! I speak a little bit of German,”* and that’s pretty much it!

In the early years of my ministry, when I was sent to Gary, Indiana to serve as the pastor of the First Free Methodist Church, one of the members of that congregation was an old German woman named **Grandma Stoll**. When she would pray, she would start out praying in English but inevitably her mother-tongue would take over and she would go off praying in German and would conclude it with a good, hearty English, *“Amen!”*

Well, I was young and foolish. I spoke a little bit of German, remember? I had studied hard for two years learning how to speak the German language. And so one of my first Sundays at that church when I greeted Grandma Stoll at the door, I said, *“Gutten Tag, Frau Stoll. Vie gehts?”* Or, *“How are you?”*

Her eyes lit up. She said, *“Sprechen sie deutsche?”* Or, *“Do you speak German?”* I smiled and said, *“Ja.”* Yes! Well, she began to rattle off in German going a hundred miles an hour and I had to raise my hands and say, *“Whoa! Whoa! I only speak a little bit of*

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German.”

She said, *“Pastor Murphy, your problem is that you don’t speak German often enough. You need practice. You need to use it. So from now on I’m not going to speak to you in English anymore. We’ll just talk in German.”*

She kept her promise...and I have no idea what the woman said to me for the seven years in which I served as her pastor.

Now I bring that up because I realize that in this series of sermons about prayer—**“Making Prayer Your Second Language”**—that we’re just scratching the surface of the crucial topic. I’m not fooling myself into thinking that these few half-hour or less sermons are going to make saints out of anyone.

It takes months and months and months of study and practice and experience to really learn how to be proficient in a second language. Two years, five days a week, an hour each day of studying German and all I can say, *“Good day; how are you; and I speak a little bit of German.”* That’s not nearly enough knowledge to carry on a very meaningful conversation with someone in German.

So I understand that we’re just hitting the basics here when it comes to this matter of prayer. But here’s my hope. Here’s *my* prayer: **That if you haven’t been praying all that much, that what I’ve said has sparked a desire deep in your heart to talk to the Lord in ways that maybe you were not very good at before.**

That’s what these first 3 messages on **Adoration, Confession** and **Thanksgiving** should have accomplished. Now this morning I want to spend some time talking about this matter of making requests of God, asking Him for something, our petitions in prayer, because that’s the aspect of prayer in which most people are interested. How can I get God to pay attention when I say, *“Please, Jesus, can you just do these one or two things for me?”*

There’s a term for this element of prayer and it’s called **Supplication**. It is that 4th letter in the little acronym we have been using to help us

identify and remember the 4 fundamental elements of prayer. *Do you remember the acronym? A-C-T-S*, ACTS. Just remember it's one of the books of the Bible and here are what those 4 letters stand for or represent.

A stands for **Adoration** or praise.

C stands for **Confession**, to acknowledge and/or admit the truth.

T stands for **Thanksgiving**, or gratitude, appreciation.

S stands for **Supplication**, or this matter of making requests of God.

It's interesting to me that when the disciples of Jesus observed Him in prayer they quickly came to the conclusion that He had something going in His prayer life that they did not. And one of them was bold enough to say to Jesus, *"Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples"* (Luke 11:1 NIV).

Now here was a group of devout Jewish men. They were deeply religious. They were spiritually inclined. They had a desire to be godly. As Jewish men of faith, they undoubtedly practiced the ancient tradition of praying three times each day—at the time of the morning sacrifice, at midday, and then at the time of the evening sacrifice.

They were people of prayer! But when they observed Jesus when He prayed, they instantly understood that they knew nothing, really, about prayer. And so one of them said to Jesus, *"Lord, teach us to pray."*

Do you remember how Jesus responded? He responded by giving to them a model prayer which we call the *"Lord's Prayer."* Now, obviously, Jesus was doing more than just giving them some words to memorize and recite over and over again in prayer. He was giving them insight to certain basics that must be present in order to communicate with and connect to God...and to tap into His power and His resources.

So please take your Bibles and turn to this teaching that is contained in the *"Lord's Prayer."* You will find it in the book of **Matthew**, the **6th chapter**, beginning with **verse 9**.

Jesus said, *"This is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name'"* (Matthew 6:9 NIV). This, of course, is an expression of praise, adoration, the first basic element we talked about in prayer.

The next line is, *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10 NIV). This is the part of the prayer upon which I want you to focus your thoughts. We can paraphrase it like this. Jesus is saying, *"You have an agenda, Father. I understand that You would like things here on earth to operate much like they do in heaven. So, Father, I want to align my life with that directive. Your agenda will be my agenda."*

We see an example of what Jesus is talking about here when He prays in the Garden of Gethsemane shortly before His arrest. *Do you recall that powerful scene from Scripture?* Jesus has His face to the ground. Sweat falls from His brow like large drops of blood. He is troubled in spirit. He is sorrowful. He tells His Father very honestly that he doesn't relish the ordeal of the cross that He knows is just ahead.

He says, *"Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me"* (Matthew 26:39 NIV). He is talking about the cup of suffering, the agony of the cross. But the bigger consideration is what God wants—God's agenda. And knowing what that is, Jesus says, *"Yet, not as I will, but as you will."*

That's his bottom line. *"Your agenda, Father, takes priority over mine."* When making requests of God, I believe this is an incredibly important point. *Is what I am asking of the Lord just my agenda, or does it mesh with His will as well?*

That's the first law of prayer. Jesus says, *"I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it"* (John 14:13-14 NIV). There are three little words that occur twice in this short passage. You need to underline them. They are the words *"in my name."*

Here is what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, *"Ask anything you want and I will do it."* He doesn't say that. Now that's what a lot of people hear when they read this promise but it isn't what He says. He says,

“Ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” To pray in Jesus’ name is to pray in accordance with His will. It is saying, in essence, *“Jesus, I want to align my request with Your will. I want my agenda to be Your agenda.”* It is to say, *“Thy kingdom come, They will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

These same words are reiterated in the very next chapter. In **John 15:16** Jesus says, *“The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name”* (NIV). Don’t miss those last three words.

These words are stated again in a little different way in the next chapter. In **John 16:23** Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name”* (NIV).

It’s like Jesus is saying, *“Listen, I don’t want you to miss this so I’m going to say it three times. It is imperative that when you make requests of God that you have in mind His agenda and not just your agenda. That you pray in accordance with His will. That you pray in Jesus’ name. That you filter every request you make through this simple prayer: ‘Not my will, but Thine be done.’”*

I want you to just stop for a moment and think about what you’ve been praying about recently, what you’ve been asking God for. *Have you got them there in your mind?* Now let me ask a question. *Does it have more to do with your agenda or God’s agenda? Are you able to really pray it “in Jesus’ name?”*

For instance, it would be really difficult, wouldn’t it, to pray *“in Jesus’ name”* for Him to give you the winning numbers to next week’s Powerball Lottery game, right? He could! He knows all things. But that has nothing to do with His agenda and everything to do about your agenda.

And, furthermore, that’s not how God goes about His business. That’s diametrically opposed to everything the Lord teaches us about stewardship and being good stewards. He doesn’t want us to build our lives on the faulty foundations of pure luck and blind chance. It would be out of character for Him to answer a request like that.

So just think back to what you’ve been praying about recently. *Does it have more to do with your agenda or God’s agenda?*

Perhaps you’ve been praying to get out of debt. *“God, help us financially.”* If God answered that prayer, if suddenly some distant relative left you a load of money in their will, would you learn from that lesson and become a better Christian steward of your resources or in a year or two from now would you be back in that same hole?

Maybe you’ve been praying that God would give you a better job? What would happen if God would give you that better job? Would you just continue to live like your living now but be able to get more stuff, better things, new treasures; or would this be an opportunity to spend more time with your family at night, pray with your children before they go to bed, get involved in a small group, participate in some ministry, because you don’t have to work that second shift and be gone every night of the week?

Maybe you’ve been praying that God would touch you and bring healing to your body. If God would do that, would you keep living with the same priorities you’ve always had or would this be an opportunity to live your life more in line with His desires? Would you be quick to give Him the credit for doing a miracle in your life or would you just kind of take it in stride, chalk it up to the marvels of modern medicine?

Here’s my point. **When asking something of God, first pause to consider whether your request is in line with His desires.** Can you truly ask for it *“in Jesus’ name.”* One of the hidden blessings of prayer is the wonderful opportunity it gives us to just be in God’s presence, get in tune with His agenda, and align our agenda with His agenda.

Now let me just add a second thought. When asking something of God, pause to consider whether your request and your life are in line with His desires. Not just your words, not just your requests, but your life! *Is how you are living in line with God’s expectations?*

Just think for a moment. *How would you respond if someone who offended you, who had little time or interest in helping you or supporting*

you, who often opposed what you were trying to accomplish, rushed up to you one day and asked for a significant favor? Would you be quick to reply, “Sure, why not?” or would you think, “Why is he coming to me now? What is his ulterior motive? If he’s always opposing me and what I’m trying to do, why should I help him?”

Listen to what Jesus says in **John 15:7**, *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you”* (NIV). Jesus isn’t talking here about just memorizing Scripture. He is talking about obedience, holiness, living our lives in accordance with His will and His Word and His way.

Earlier in this very same passage of Scripture, Jesus says, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5 NIV). Not a thing! Zero, zilch, nada! *“Apart from me,”* Jesus says, “you are just a big goose egg!”

“If anyone does not remain me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6 NIV).

Then comes the verse we looked at earlier. *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”* This, of course, relates directly to this topic of making prayer requests.

Is Jesus saying that the prayers of people who live in close relationship with Him are going to be more effective than the ones spoken by individuals who tend to fudge on their faith every now and then and aren’t close to Him? I’d say that’s precisely what He is saying!

James, who was the half-brother of our Lord and knew Him so well, once wrote these words: *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective”* (James 5:16 NIV). The *King James Version* translates this verse like this: *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* – or has great power in its effects.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* renders it like this: *“The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.”*

Right now some of you may be thinking, *“I guess that means I’m in trouble when it comes to having my prayers answered, because I’m a long way from where I ought to be spiritually speaking.”* My response would be two-fold.

One, that’s not a bad reality to come to grips with. The Bible clearly indicates that our sins separate us from God. Listen to the words of **Isaiah 59**. *“Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear”* (Isaiah 59:1-2 NIV). Paul says, *“A man ought to examine himself”* (1st Corinthians 11:28 NIV).

We need to come to grips with sin in our lives. That’s what the element of confession which we talked about a couple of weeks ago is all about. But here’s the good news. Here’s the second thing I would say to you this morning. If you will humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, He will lift you up.

Listen to the words of **David** in **Psalm 51:17**. *“A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”* (NIV). Said differently, if I want say I’m sorry and really want to change my behavior to what God says is right, He won’t belittle me and say, *“Sure, sure, I’ve heard it all before.”*

As a loving parent would hug a child who tearfully confessed to doing wrong, so I believe God, upon our confession, draws us to Himself and gives us another chance, and then immediately acts as though the offense never happened. Isn’t that what the Bible says? *“He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us”* (Psalm 103:10, 12 NIV).

So here’s what I want you to take home with you today. **When asking something of God, pause to consider whether your request and**

your life are in line with His desires.

Now add to that thought this word from Scripture. *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him”* (1st John 5:14-15 NIV).

The question is not will He hear us, but will we hear Him?