# Week of Prayer 2018

# INTO THE REASURES OF GOD'S HEART AS HE HAS PROMISED IN HIS

RESTVIEW

# INTRODUCTION

As we wrap up another year and look into a new one, we are continuing a rhythm that we observe as a church: a week of prayer together. To put it simply: we are starting the year by pursuing God together. What is prayer? I don't think we can improve on this amazing definition from John Bunyan (author of A Pilgrim's Progress): "A sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to His Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God." I know that's a mouthful (or brainful) but it gets to the heart of prayer. God answers the genuine prayers of His children.

For our purposes in this week, we are thinking about this theme of digging into the treasures of God's heart, as He's promised in His Word. God is for us and not against us. The war is whether or not we believe that as His people. So, this week of prayer will be plunging the depths of God's heart into promises like this, that we may step out together in faith in this coming year. For our devotional this week, we'll be digging into the treasures of God's heart by thinking of some Biblical reasons for prayer:

- 1) to depend upon Him
- 2) to purify the desires of our hearts
- 3) to be content with whatever our Father provides
- 4) to appreciate more deeply God's generosity and faithfulness to us
- 5) to enjoy without guilt His many gifts
- 6) to trust God to provide our daily needs and never let us down

Too often, "*we have not because we ask not, or ask with wrong motives to spend it on ourselves.*" So, our hope is to dig into these reasons and reach the treasures that await us in God's heart.

Will you join me and others this week as we pray together.

Pastor Phil

### Monday, January 1, 2018

### We Pray To Depend Upon Him

Read Psalm 63.

In this Psalm, David is in the wilderness. He's either running from Saul or this is written later in life as he's running from his son Absalom's coup attempt. And, he's desperate for God. He's seeking God with all of His heart. So, one of the reasons we pray is express our desire for God Himself. John Calvin expressed this as he unpacked this first reason for prayer: "[we pray] that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor."

On the one hand, when we pray, we're expressing a desire to seek, love, and serve God. We're reorienting our heart to its main goal and intent, being swept up to heaven. For those of us who have a relationship with God is there really anything that compares to Him? And, in this same way, when we pray in this way, we're reminding ourselves that for every need we can think of, God is the destination and aim. We can bring this confidently to Him and depend on Him.

As we begin this week of prayer, then, will you seek Him? Jot a prayer in the space provided here expressing to God all that He is to you. Ask Him to draw your heart out in dependence upon Him.

## TUESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2018

### We Pray To Purify the Desires of Our Hearts

Read Proverbs 4:23-27.

In this short section from Proverbs, we have instruction on speech, our eyes, and the ways we walk. Each of these aspects of our living can easily be influenced by others, the world, or simply drug away to lesser pursuits. But, right there in v.23, we get insight into how we can keep our way of life loyal to God: by keeping our heart with all vigilance. From our hearts flow the springs of life. And, for those of us who know Jesus can have confidence that "Whoever believes [in Jesus], out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). So, doing heart work and reining in those desires are important.

Calvin related this to a reason we pray. He says, "[we pray] that there may enter our hearts no desire and no wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts." When we bring our heart and all its wishes before God in prayer, there's a purifying effect on our desires, so we should bring all of our wishes and pour out our whole hearts before Him.

Take some time in the space to place what your heart is desiring right now at the start of this year. Maybe even journal some things as a way of making God a witness to your desires. And, then, pray these words from Psalm 139:23–24:

[23] Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
[24] And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2018

### We Pray To Be Content with Whatever Our Father Provides

### Read Hebrews 13:5-6

This passage pulls no punches in our lives. We're called away from the love of money to be content with what we have. But, I'm interested in the why this passage offers for such a way of life? What do you see? We can be content with what we have because of God Himself. He has said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Because of this, we can confidently say, *"the Lord is my helper, I will not fear, what can man do to me?"* 

And, this relates to prayer. Calvin writes: "[we pray] that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand." Think of this. When you pray, you're subtly reminding your soul that it's not you that has provided all the "stuff" of your life. You're preaching to heart that God has done this. Therefore, prayer is a way of preparing our hearts to be content with what God provides for us and we show our hearts are here by having a heart of gratitude and thanksgiving.

Take some time here and write a "thank you note" to God for all that He's blessed you with. And, follow this with a prayer that God would make your heart content with what He's given you. Thursday, January 4, 2018

# We Pray To Appreciate More Deeply God's Generosity and Faithfulness To Us

### Read Titus 3:3-8.

As you think about this amazing passage, we're reminded of the Gospel message that makes us who we are. He has changed us from being slaves, being hated, and hating others to benefitting from the work of Christ. But, notice the hinge of v.4 – But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared... His goodness and loving kindness is the heart behind what He's done to save us.

When we pray, Calvin raises the stakes, helping us see that "[we pray] morever, that, having obtained what we were seeking, and being convinced that he has answered our prayers, we should be led to meditate upon his kindness more ardently." Pray should produce the fruit of the Spirit in us. We should appreciate God's kindness to us in deeper ways. I love how he words this as "meditating upon his kindness more ardently." Which means that when we pray, the fruit produced in us is a passionate, excited meditation on His kindness.

Think about God's loving kindness towards you. How has He been kind? Mention some of these things. Specifically, also, consider His kindness to you in the good news. Write a prayer of praise to God as a way of *"meditating on kindness more ardently.*"

# FRIDAY, JANUARY 5, 2018

### We Pray To Enjoy, Without Guilt, His Many Gifts

#### Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19

There's lots of talk in this passage about being rich. People are recognized as "being rich in this present age" and called to be "*rich in good works.*" *But, the foundation or bedrock of all these riches should be God, "who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*" Is your life characterized by a deep enjoyment of what God's given for us to enjoy? Or, are you at times paralyzed by guilt, dampening the enjoyment that is yours because of what God's given?

Calvin relates this to a purpose of prayer. He says, "*[we pray] that at the same time we embrace with greater delight those things which we acknowledge to have been obtained by prayers.*" Where yesterday, the emphasis was on God kindness being extolled more ardently, the emphasis here is on the delight that God's coming through should produce. We should enjoy what God's done in our lives. Whether it's circumstances, material goods, or His abiding providence providing help, delightful enjoyment should be ours.

Use the space provided to record some answers to prayer that God has accomplished this past year. After listing at least 2-3, take time to ask God to change your heart to delight and enjoy these blessings that have come from His hand.

# SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 2018

### We Pray To Trust God To Provide Our Daily Needs and Never Let Us Down

#### Read Psalm 54.

Go ahead and read that Psalm again. You can almost feel the desperation, helplessness, and lamentation that David is pleading with God about. Strangers, ruthless men, and enemies are rushing upon him, seeking his life. But God. But God. God is the helper. God has come to help him. God is the helper that David can rest in.

As we relate this to prayer, Calvin ends in a flourish: "Finally, [we pray] that use and experience may, according to the measure of our feebleness, confirm his Providence, while we understand not only that he promises never to fail us, and of his own will opens the way to call upon him at the very point of necessity, but also that he ever extends his hand to help his own, not wet-nursing them with words but defending them with present help." The use of prayer and experiencing God's work in this, according to our helplessness, show God's providence. He's in control. He's for us. His promises will never fail and He asks us to call upon Him with our needs. His help isn't just lip-service but actual help that effects change in us. We can cry out to Him with our needs, then, for He will never let us down.

So, end this week with the burdens of your heart. What are the needs, requests, and burdens that you bring into this year? List some of those here. And, finish this week of prayer taking time to bring those to God Himself. After listing these needs, finish prayer with confidence that God will help.

Take time to pray for our "International Ministry Partners" so that we don't lose sight of our partnership in the Gospel with these individuals:

Bill & Kathy Bacheller – Brazil Ben & Emily Cornish – International Teaching Rick & Tracy Cornish – International Teaching Joe & Denise – Central Asia David & Julie Stickel – International Students at UNC-Chapel Hill Luke & Julie – India (as well as Satya Shiksha Seva) Elrond & Sheree Wedel – Immanuel Mission, Navajo Nation