

Prayer

**A transcript of a sermon by Pete Bullette
Edited by Michelle Freeman and Julia Robertson**

What I want you to learn is how to dig your own well, so that when you are light years down the road in your walk with God, you will be set up to walk with God wherever he takes you. No matter what the circumstances, no matter how dry things are around you, you know how to get out the tools and start to dig your own well—a deep well with God that is full of living water.

There are basically two major tools that God gives us to dig our own well. The first tool that God gives us is the Scriptures. You need to be a person who knows how to feast on God's Word—a person who agrees with Jesus when he says that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." As you use this tool, you will be led to use the other tool that is crucial to dig a deep well. The other tool is prayer! It is how we dig the hole to receive the rain, if you will.

These two tools are what we use to put ourselves in position to receive the wisdom and revelation that the Holy Spirit wants to give us so we can know God better. As you use the first tool of Scripture, it will lead you to respond in prayer—it should lead you to a *life* of prayer. If not, then it is like just breaking up the dirt but never using a shovel to get it out. Prayer is how we get Scripture to permeate and take root in our hearts. And Scripture is what informs our prayer. We don't just pray based on speculation about God, full of distortions, but we pray based on his revelation given to us through Scripture. Thus the use of one tool leads to the use of the other.

When this happens, not only will your well go deeper in your relationship with God, but then you also will be a deep well for many people around you. Bernard of Clairvaux, from the 12th century, used the images of a canal verses a reservoir. He said that a canal just spreads water abroad as it receives it, but a reservoir is filled before overflowing, and then gives, without loss to itself, its superabundant water. He said we have many canals but few reservoirs!¹ We need more reservoirs, or to use my image, we need more deep and wide wells! Richard Foster says "The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."² Determine to be a reservoir or a deep well! Let's take a closer look at the tool of prayer.

Inside Focus

I think there are two major ways people think about prayer. There is one group that would say prayer doesn't really make that big of a difference. It isn't that consequential. Rather, God uses our needs to bring us to him so we can commune with him. He will change *us* through prayer so we can embrace the circumstance, but it doesn't really change circumstances—it changes us. This view stresses the relational side of prayer at the expense of prayer having any fundamental causality (it doesn't cause anything to happen or have any influence on real events). This group quotes Scriptures like Matthew 6:8, "God knows what you need before you ask him." I would say yes, in prayer we don't inform God, but we express our dependence on him and bring him into the equation of whatever we are facing.

¹ Richard Foster, *Prayer*, 168

² Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1

The problem is, this view of prayer stands against many other Scriptures. There are verses that speak to the fact that prayer does make a difference (2 Cor. 1:10-11, Phil. 1:19). I love this quote by Paul York: "There are some things that God will not do even if you ask him. There are some things that God will do even if we don't ask him. Then there are some things that the Bible says will happen only if we do pray" (James 5:13-16, 2 Chronicles 7:11-16, Mark 9:29, to name a few).

Outside Focus

Then there are others who focus on the causality of prayer. They say things like, "All you need to do is stand on the promise, have unwavering faith, name it and claim it, and it shall be yours." This can be a way of trying to get what we want as if God were a slot machine. If you say the right thing and pull the handle, God spits out the right stuff. And in the process, the relational aspect of prayer is lost. There is no intimacy of prayer. Your prayer time starts to be all about getting through your "prayer list" and saying the right thing. This group may not verbalize that there isn't a relational aspect to prayer, but it just gets lost in the wash. They miss where in the Scripture it says that the Holy Spirit within us cries out, "Abba, Father", longing for intimacy with God. Prayer is intensely intimate. Jesus taught us to pray "Our Father...".

The Pinnacle of Prayer

I would submit that the pinnacle of prayer is when your view of prayer understands both—there is powerful influence that is born out of our relationship with him.

Let's talk about how God uses prayer to lead us into this. There are many forms of prayer that place us in position to receive from the Holy Spirit wisdom and revelation. As we engage in thanksgiving, adoration, praise, worship (singing), listening in his presence, resting in his presence, and confession, God leads us to know him better. God uses these methods to get our attention, and as we commune with him and connect with our heavenly Father, we begin to be reminded of who he is.

It is like over the course of our days, our view of God starts to fall slowly and subtly, but when we enter into worship, adoration and thanksgiving, he is magnified in the eyes of our heart. As he is magnified, we see him more clearly and in greater detail, and we get to know him better. Not just know *about* him, but by the work of the Holy Spirit, we can commune with him and get to know him better!

I love a quote from *Prince Caspian* by C. S. Lewis. Aslan says to Lucy, "Every year you grow, you will find me bigger." May that be! As you grow, may you find God bigger! May we be people with deep wells full of intimate knowledge of him! Will we put ourselves in position to receive wisdom and revelation from the Holy Spirit, and allow the Holy Spirit to take it from our head to revelation in our heart?

In Ephesians 1:19-23, Paul talks about the power of God. He says he wants us to know "His *incomparably great* power for us who believe" [emphasis added]. The word in Greek that we translate "incomparably" great, literally means to "go beyond" our greatest conception. Your greatest conception of what God's power is—God's power goes beyond it! Mark Batterson says, "It is impossible to overestimate God!" I love that. His power is infinite! It is **resurrection power**! It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, defeating sin, death and hell. Christianity is a religion of power—**ultimate power**! Jesus sits in the seat of ultimate power! At the Father's right hand in the heavenly realms. He is more powerful than any demonic or evil power, over any human power. He has the ultimate title!

Paul says he wants us to know that this power is available to us, who believe in Jesus. Prayer is how we access this incomparably great power! Oh, that God's people would know the power that is available to us and access it through prayer to be victorious in our personal lives and fight the enemy in our world.

What would happen if we became a fellowship who lived as Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus, with an understanding of God's incomparably great power available to us and continually accessed that power through prayer? What could God do at UVA? I can tell you the precursor for every great revival is prayer!

Let me end where I started: I want you to be a person and I want us to be a fellowship with a deep well; people who know how to dig our own well. Will we put ourselves in position for the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and revelation and get to know God better? Will we access God's incomparably great power that is available to us through prayer?

Relevant Scriptures

2 Chron. 7:11-16	Solomon's dedication of the temple to God
Matt 6:5-15	<i>"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites..."</i>
Mark 9:14-29	(v.29) <i>He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."</i>
James 5:13-16	<i>Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray...</i>
Ephesians 1:17-23	<i>I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...</i>

Questions for discussion

- What do you think actually happens when we pray? Is it for us, God, or for both?
- Do you find yourself focusing more on the inner or outer aspect of prayer? How does thinking through the pinnacle of prayer help you bring balance?
- When have you seen answers to prayer in your own life or in the lives of others? What has this done for your faith and your view of God?
- What do you want to see God do in his incomparably great power? This could be on many levels: for the world, UVA, Chi Alpha, your family, and for you.
- In what ways do you want to grow in being a person of prayer?
- How can you dig a deeper well with God this week?