

September 2, 2018 Am
Pastor Ken Hepner

“PRAYING FOR THE PRODIGALS:

1. **“Engaging with the Heart of God at the Throne of Grace”**
Hebrews 4:13 – 16 and Philippians 4:4 – 7

Introduction:

This morning we are joining with local pastors and local churches to share the first of six weeks of messages concerning praying for the prodigal sons and daughters in our spheres of influence. In our spiritual life week meetings in 2016, we had local pastors share the Word of the Lord with us. On Monday night, Bob Landis, pastor of the River Church, spoke on “The Father’s Heart for the Prodigals.”

The Lord did an incredible work in the hearts of hundreds of people that night. There was a call for people to come forward and write names on pieces of paper, which we then took and photocopied those names and shared them with all of the local pastors who had preached the Word with us. There were over 300 names written down that night! We have been encouraging prayer for the prodigals in all of our churches since that night.

This series of six messages on “Praying for the Prodigals” comes out of that burden of the Lord we all felt that night. This morning we join with local pastors and churches to preach a united series of messages. This week is the call to prayer. Then in the next three weeks we will share messages on Asking Prayer, Seeking Prayer, and Knocking Prayer as we pray and seek the Lord’s Holy Spirit to find the hearts of those who have turned away from following Jesus.

There is a fundamental truth about prayer that all of us need to see and understand as we begin this morning. **Engaging in Heartfelt, Passionate Prayer** for others is one of the most important things we can ever do on planet earth. Through prayer we are invited to partner with the Holy Spirit as He does His work in the lives of the people we dearly love! The Spirit of Jesus invites us to hear and receive burdens that are on His heart for the people we love in our spheres of influence.

There is an absolutely beautiful call to prayer the Apostle Paul wrote in his pastoral letter to the church at Philippi, a very important Roman colony city in Macedonia, present-day Turkey. Paul encourages heart-felt intercessory prayer on behalf of everyone and everything in this beautiful call to prayer.

Philippians 4:4 – 7 “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Applying that paragraph of Scripture calling us to pray passionately for all of our needs, to intercession for the prodigal sons and daughters in our spheres of influence is not difficult to do.

The Lord deeply desires to save and heal the hearts of people. He passionately longs for the prodigal sons and daughters to come home. Remember in Jesus' story of the prodigal son's father, he was looking down the road longing for his wayward son to come home. That is the picture Jesus painted for us of how our heavenly Father feels about people for whom we pray.

Cedar Grove Church family, when we pray, it is so important that we do so in confidence that the Lord God to whom we pray cares deeply about those for whom we intercede. The Lord Jesus is near, so when you pray for your loved ones don't pray out of anxiety. Pray with deep love and confidence that the Lord Jesus loves your lost loved ones more than you do, and He wants to partner with you as you pray out everything you feel in prayer!

I. How the Prodigals Got Lost Along the Way:

The truth is prodigals get caught up in the **Ways** and **Values** of this **World System** of things and lose their way. We live in the midst of a society that prizes, highly values material security, almost as though this life is all there is to living. In the material world we value autonomy, that we can provide security for ourselves and our family members. The issue or material success is always more, it's about perks and packages, that is, finding a better income to get more, bigger and better things.

However, as many in our society are coming to realize more and more; **Prosperity** is not truly **Satisfying!** What is created by our running lifestyle are people who live in stress and tension. We are the society of the tired, who go to the brink of exhaustion and feel numb inside, who try to replenish ourselves by sitting in front of the TV "Vegging out." Or we try to self-medicate with recreational drugs and alcohol, we get caught in endless cycles of inner needs in the heart and soul.

What we need to understand is that we live in the midst of a culture that is materially prosperous and morally bankrupt, with a complete absence of societal conscience. Our society has created and embraced tremendous **Spiritual Poverty**. We cannot transfer our ability to provide for ourselves in the material realm over into the spiritual. Human understanding and provisions in spiritual living leads to humanism and subjectivism. Look at the entertainment industry. The value is that all spiritual encounters are positive based on to how I feel about them.

In this culture we have placed pretty significant value on things our God Almighty disdains. We value rugged **Individualism**, and self-helping human **Autonomy**, which honestly are sinful self-interest masquerading as something else! These values have led millions of people in this culture to three chronic illnesses of the soul:

Isolation – that is we have become so autonomous, and have chosen to help ourselves for so long, we actually give ourselves the message that we don't need anyone. Yet inside us there is a deep inner longing to meaningfully know and to be known by people whom we respect.

Loneliness – the emotional debt that has become the official disease experienced by people of this culture in the decade of the nineties. We have become the people of the hollow eyes, a deep sense of being unfulfilled within. We have received this powerful emotional message, because

of the inner hunger we all have to be meaningfully involved with people. We need to give and receive love! We were created for two things: Relating meaningfully to God and loving one another!

Stress – We have embraced a lifestyle of running after “the good life” which of course is in the material world. Our running to get has left us in the above-described dearth of meaningful relationships. We have thus, created tremendous amounts of turmoil in our thought-life and tension in our emotions. We are a people with anxious minds.

Before we turn our attention to the passage in the book of Hebrews I want to show you an awesome picture from the life of King David who knew a good bit about what it meant to walk in stress, tension, anxiety. David wrote in Psalm 107 about his having been betrayed by a close friend. His own son Absalom was trying to kill him at one point in his kingship. He opened up his heart in songs of trust and love to God in the midst of his stress and anxiety. Its preserved for us in the book of Psalms.

Psalm 107:10 – 14 and 18 – 20 is a word about the inner prison cells of the heart David once felt enclosed within. There are powerful words here for prodigals in our culture today. The inner prison cells prodigals are in are often self-inflicted because they’ve acted like they don’t need God, they easily reject the Word of the Lord, acting as though they can make it on their own:

“Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains, for they had rebelled against the words of God and despised the counsel of the Most High. So, he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and deepest gloom and broke away their chains. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.”

What profound words to our culture and to the prodigal sons and daughters who have bought the world’s bill of goods! They turned to the Lord at the end of their ropes and He delivered them. He sent forth His Word and healed them of their spiritual poverty and emotional diseases! The Lord delivers people from inner prison cells of the heart, from our deep need we know within!

II. Let Us Make Every Effort to Enter His Provisions:

Hebrews 4:11 – 13 *“Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”*

Make Every Effort to Rest; now there’s a word for you. It is to enter into the rest that God provides, resting from attempting to work our way into a better position for salvation. The things we do for God in His kingdom will be a whole lot more joyous to us and graciously received by

God if we do things from a heart of love and adoration, rather than doing things hoping to be better in God's sight than we presently are. People in whom the Spirit dwells experience deep love of God poured out within us, love that dramatically changes us!

The truth is that in Christ Jesus the Father has accepted us as His own sons and daughters and nothing we do can ever add to that gift of His grace and mercy! The spiritual truth that I am the son of God in Jesus Christ, my sins are all pardoned, my guilt is all gone, should motivate us to desire to do things that please the Father, honor the Son, and welcome the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and lead us into His heart of love for us.

The author points his readers to understand the truth of the **Powerful Word of God in the Believer's Heart and Soul**. Basically, he wants everyone who reads or studies this word of Scripture to see that what God is after is truth and sincerity in the inward parts. God's Word made alive to us by the Holy Spirit will accomplish two purposes for which it is given:

It Discerns: When we read, study, meditate on, and memorize the Word of God, getting it into our hearts, there is a judging or assaying done by the Word of Truth. The human heart, soul, mind, and will is assayed by the Holy Spirit using the living Word to do its work in us like a metallurgist assays silver or gold, removing impurities!

a.) **Thoughts** that we are thinking that aren't true are seen as lies when laid next to God's Truth. Thoughts of self-focus as we are doing the works of the kingdom of God are seen as sinful in the light of God's truth. God already knows what you and I are thinking and His Word has a correcting effect on us.

b.) **Attitudes** of the heart that may focus on selfishness or on what we think we are entitled to as believers are seen for what they are in the light of His truth. God knows why we are doing what we are doing.

It **Divides: Soul** and **Spirit** – which is a powerful word of truth. Your soul is the essence of who you are, your mind, your will, and your emotions. Your spirit being has only been alive since you were born again, the Spirit of God took up residence in you and made you alive unto God in Christ Jesus.

Your spirit wants to soar with the Holy Spirit but your soul knows there are things inside that prevent soaring, things like sinful patterns we see in our lives, unforgiven offenses or pain in the heart. These things barely allow crawling forward in the faith, much less soaring with the Holy Spirit. The Word of God shows these discrepancies so that we may confess and be healed of weaknesses and infirmities caused by life!

III. Let Us Hold Firmly to the Faith We Profess:

Hebrews 4:14, 15 *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”*

The author of Hebrews gives us a third “Let us” word of encouragement and exhortation. Let us **Hold Firmly** to the **Faith** we profess, which is the confession of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. The truth is that **faith is our choice**. When we get saved the Lord doesn’t take away our will, our ability to make choices regarding how we will approach life. He simply puts in front of us the living Word of God, the Lord Jesus and His provisions, then the Lord God desires that we will continue to choose to walk with Him by faith.

These Christians were in grave danger of falling away from the faith in Jesus that had saved them. This word of encouragement was intended to touch their hearts and call them to steadfast faith no matter what may come. Our enemy Satan knows we are **Saved** by **Grace Through Faith**, and this is the gift of God not of works so that no one may boast, Ephesians 2:8 – 10!

The constant in this equation is the magnificent grace of God, the power of God to save us. The variable in this equation is the child of God believing and choosing to go on believing in Jesus Christ’s atoning work for us all. If you were in the enemy of our souls’ shoes would you fight the power of the grace of God you can’t defeat or would you fight the believers choosing to go on believing God no matter what may come, something you can defeat?

There are remarkable lessons here for all of God’s people today. It is so easy to revert to our human ways and means, to live life the best we know how, and neglect this incredible gift of salvation we have received. In this text we are all encouraged to walk with God by faith in Christ Jesus, to engage in faith as the medium or vehicle through which we apprehend and are apprehended by the Word of God.

he author asserts again and again that our faith rests solely in Jesus the Son of God who is at the Father’s right-hand **Interceding for Each of Us**. Because Jesus is both Son of God and Son of Man, He is able to feel compassion for each one of us. Because He is our Savior and Lord we have the ability to go on believing.

He is able to **Sympathize with our Infirmities**. This is a picture of Jesus’ heart of love for us. He is compassionate toward all of us, He feels for us in the infirmities of health, infirmities of soul – that is the pain we have experienced through relationships, and half-hearted attempts at working out our salvation. Experiencing the compassion of God has great power for our hearts.

He was **Tempted in Every Way** just like we are. Although He was Son of God He was also fully humankind and as such He was tempted in all of the ways we are tempted. Because He was tempted with sin, ego expression, and to embrace material prosperity, He knows how to help each of us to defeat those temptations. I can’t imagine how it felt to be holy and to be confronted with personal sin.

He was **Without Sin** so He can be **Trusted**. As the sinless Son of God, He has gone through much more than a man-made tabernacle. He has passed through the heavens of heavens and has been seated at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, Jesus alone is qualified to be our great High Priest and to make intercession for us at the Father’s right hand. His provisions for us have established the Throne of Grace for us all.

IV. Let Us Approach the Throne of Grace:

Hebrews 4:16 *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

The author of Hebrews now gives us his fourth “Let us” word of encouragement and exhortation. He bids us to the Throne of Grace. He says let us approach the throne of grace in **Humble, Adoring, and Repentant Prayer**. Isn’t it interesting that the author says the Lord is seated on a “Throne of Grace” right now and not that He is seated on His eternal judgment throne. You and I live in a great time to be alive. We may approach God with humble and repentant hearts because we know He has predisposed Himself to be gracious to us in Jesus!

We may approach the Throne of Grace with Freedom. Jesus said to all of his followers: *“whom the Son has set free is free indeed,”* and *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall set your free.”* You and I have freedom of access into the very presence of the Father because of who Jesus is and what He has done. The word rendered confidence in the text is the Greek word *parresias*, meaning “freedom in speaking, boldness in speech, freely, boldly.”

We may bring to God anything we are struggling with, the pain we are dealing with, sins we are wrestling with, hard places of life we have no control over. And when we do we will receive a warm welcome because He bids us all to come to Him.

We may approach the Throne of Grace with Confidence. We may pour out our souls to the Lord in prayer about anything with confidence, because He is worthy of our trust. The Lord can be taken at His Word because He is faithful through the ages. What He has promised He will do, because He is Truth, consequently it is impossible for God to lie. Remember the Greek word *parresias*, described earlier, rendered “confidence?” Well it also has alternative connotations, “licensed, having authority, confidently.”

We have a Savior who knows how we feel and what we are dealing with so we may come and speak freely and confidently knowing that He hears us. We have a license, authority in Christ Jesus to come to Him in heartfelt passionate prayer, laying our needs at the feet of Him who sits on the Mercy Seat!

John adds a word about this in I John 5:14, 15 *“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.”*

When we pour out our hearts and souls in prayer, meaning business with God from the heart, we **Receive His Mercy and Help**. The truth is, brothers and sisters, all of us at times face trials, heartaches, and painful things in our lives that we have absolutely no control over. We all have things in our lives we would like to see different than they presently are. The real issue is what are we doing with these heart and soul issues? Are we doing our best to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get on with life? Or are we pouring out our hearts and souls to Jesus at the Mercy

Seat, asking Him to act in our lives and the lives of our loved ones as though our lives depended on it?

Conclusion:

What does this mean to engage with the heart of God for the prodigal sons and daughters in our sphere of influence?

It means that we put our effort into doing the kinds of things that will welcome the Holy Spirit to do His transforming and gracious work in our hearts and souls. Work at connecting meaningfully with God in time alone with Him in Confession, Surrender, in reading and meditating on Scripture and in Heartfelt Prayer at the Throne of Grace.

PRAYING FOR THE PRODIGALS:
1. "Engaging with the Heart of God at the Throne of Grace"
Hebrews 4:13 – 16 and Philippians 4:4 – 7

Introduction:

We are beginning a series of messages on "Praying for the Prodigals." The series was birthed out of a message Bob Landis shared at Cedar Grove at our spiritual life week meetings in November 2016.

E _____ in **H** _____, **P** _____ prayer for those we love is one of the most important activities we can do.

The Apostle Paul encourages deep intercession for everything and everyone in Philippians 4:4 – 7.

The Lord our God deeply desires to save the prodigal sons and daughters. In Jesus' words the prodigal's father looked down the road longing for his son to come home!

I. How the Prodigals Got Lost Along the Way:

The truth is our prodigal sons and daughters get caught up in the **W** _____ and **V** _____ of this **W** _____ **S** _____ of things and they lose their way.

However, many in our society are learning the hard truth: **P** _____ of does not really **S** _____ the deep longing within.

We live in the midst of a culture that is materially prosperous and often morally bankrupt. In our society we have deep **S** _____ **P** _____!

In this culture we value rugged **I** _____ and self-helping human **A** _____, which are sinful self-interest masquerading as something else!

These values have led millions of people to have three "chronic illnesses of the soul:"

I _____ ... **L** _____ ... **S** _____

King David wrote an awesome picture of living with stress, tension, and anxiety. In Psalm 107:10 – 14 and 18 – 20 he writes about "inner prison cells of the heart," powerful words to us about what prodigals feel!

II. Let Us Make Every Effort to Enter His Provisions: Hebrews 4:11 -13

He writes to his readers: Make **E** _____ **E** _____ to **R** _____ in the provisions of Jesus for our salvation, and not to rely on our own works!

When I know I am a child of God, my sins are pardoned and my guilt is gone I am motivated to serve Jesus with my whole heart.

He points his readers to know the truth of the **P** _____ Word of God to the believer's **H** _____ and **S** _____.

God's Word made alive in us by the Holy Spirit will accomplish two purposes for which it is given:

--It **D** _____ 1.) **T** _____ and 2.) **A** _____

--It **D** _____ between **S** _____ and **S** _____

III. Let Us Hold Firmly to the Faith We Profess: Hebrews 4:14, 15

The author exhorts the reader with his third “let us” word: **H**_____ **F**_____ to the **F**_____ we profess. His readers were in grave danger of falling away from the faith in Jesus that saved them.

Our enemy Satan knows we have been saved by **G**_____ through our **F**_____ and it is the gift of God not by works, Ephesians 2:8 – 10.

The author encourages the readers to go on believing in Jesus for faith is the medium through which we apprehend and are apprehended by God’s Word!

Three truths about Jesus at the Father’s Right Hand **I**_____ for us: 1. He is able to **S**_____ with our weaknesses, 2. He was **T**_____ in every way just as we are. 3. He was **W**_____ **S**_____ so He can be **T**_____.

IV. Let US Then Approach the Throne of Grace: Hebrews 4:16

The fourth “let us” word of encouragement calls us to approach the Throne of Grace in **H**_____, **A**_____, and **R**_____ prayer.

We may approach the Throne of Grace with **F**_____. The word in the Greek text is parresias, “freedom in speaking, boldness in speech.”

We may approach the Throne of Grace with **C**_____. Another connotation of parresias is “licensed, having authority, confidently.” John adds the words, I John 5:14, 15

When we pour out our souls in heartfelt passionate prayer we receive His **M**_____ and **H**_____ in our expressed need!

Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups

1. As you think about our Heavenly Father's searching and reaching heart for people, do you think most people really understand this truth about Him?
2. Why do you think so relatively few people engage in heartfelt, passionate prayer for others in their spheres of influence?
3. What are your thoughts on how people who were once walking with Jesus or a vital part of a church body, fall away from their walk with Jesus and become prodigal sons and daughters?
4. Do you think people today really understand the truth that the ways and values of the world system we live in is hostile to our personal walk with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith?
5. We saw the truths King David wrote in the 107th Psalm regarding people getting imprisoned in "inner prison cells of the heart." How does this happen?
6. The author Hebrews instructs his readers about the power of God's Word made alive in the hearts of people. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in making the Word of God alive in our hearts?
7. As you think about Jesus as your personal High Priest and Intercessor before God the Father, which of His attributes do you more closely identify with?
8. The author encourages us to come to the Throne of Grace in three ways. Which one or ones touch your heart, mind, and soul more deeply?
9. Read together aloud Luke 15:11 – 31 and discuss insights you have regarding the hearts and actions of the prodigal son, the dad, and the older brother.
10. What are some things the Lord God spoke to your own heart as you heard the message? What are some ways you can grow your prayer life with the Lord Jesus at the Throne of Grace?