

We're Pleading, Prayer's Pleasing, God's Pleased

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like us just to turn back together to Sam 27. Last Sunday, this Sunday, and next Sunday, we are doing a short study on prayer.

And we want to do that regularly. We want to keep coming back to think about prayer because it's an incredibly important part of our lives as Christians and as a church. But there's two big reasons why I want us to look at prayer.

One is because prayer is something that every Christian and every church needs to do. But the other reason is because prayer is something that every Christian and every church struggles to do.

Last week, we started with the question, how does it feel a sense of pressure or a sense of, make you feel? And I gave you several options. Does it make you feel a sense of pressure or a sense of peace?

Guilt or gladness, failure or freedom, doubt or delight, cynicism or satisfaction. And I'm assuming for our cities that you are generally on this side.

[1 : 0 8] And the reason I'm assuming that you're generally on that side is because I'm generally on that side. That's so often the way I can sometimes feel and think in relation to prayer.

But our aim over these three Sundays is to try and get away from this side and to get more onto this side. Because this is where a biblical understanding of prayer should take us.

Our series is called, Poor, Please, Persist. And each of these words helps us to understand the nature of prayer, what it is, the practice of prayer, how we do it, and the purpose of prayer, why we should do it.

Last week, we were looking at this word poor and we saw that that was a beautiful definition of prayer. If you ask the question, what is prayer? It's just pouring out your heart to God, which is a great reminder that we can be open before Him.

In fact, prayer is the one place where you can really be yourself because you don't have to put any masks up before God. Poor also helps us to think about how we should pray.

[2 : 1 6] It's reminding us that prayer doesn't need to be eloquent or polished or profound or fast to God. It's okay for our prayers to be messy. We just pour out our hearts to God.

And poor also teaches us about why we pray because as we pour out our hearts to God and leave all our cares and our anxieties and our fears and our inadequacies with Him, we are making room in our hearts for Him to pour His love into us.

So poor is a great word for us to think about in terms of prayer. This week, we're going to think about the word please. And as we do so, we're going to turn back to Psalm 27.

Let me read verses four and five again. One thing I've asked of the Lord that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple, for He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble.

He will conceal me under the cover of His tent. He will lift me high upon a rock. And we're going to think about three things that all arise from this word please.

[3 : 26] We're going to look at, our three points are, we're pleading, prayers pleasing, God's pleased. And that's a little bit of a tongue twister. It's very hard to say quickly. And it all sounds very similar, but those three statements are actually all teaching us distinct and crucial truths about prayer.

And each of them are things we need to know and to make sure we never forget. We're pleading, prayers pleasing, God's pleased. So first of all, when we think of prayer, we need to remember that we are pleading.

And the Psalms are fiction of songs, but they're not just pleading. And that's an important thing to remember. The Psalms are a collection of songs, but they're not just songs, they're also prayers.

And they're constantly bringing requests, supplications, questions before God. And Psalm 27 is a great example. You can see lots of examples of this Psalm, in this Psalm of God being asked to do something.

So verse seven is asking God to hear him, to be gracious to him, to answer him. Verse nine, he's saying to God, hide not your face, turn your servant not away, cast me not off, forsake me not.

[4 : 38] Same down in verse 11, teach me, lead me. Verse 12, give me not up to the will of my enemies. All of this is just asking for stuff from God.

It's pleading. And you see the same thing all over the Bible. In the Old Testament, lots of examples. Jacob here in Genesis 32 was returning to his homeland, and he was very anxious about meeting his brother, Esau, they had fallen out years before.

And he's pleading with God, please deliver me from the hand of my brother, because I fear him that he's gonna come and attack me. And it turned out that Esau didn't attack him, but that was Jacob's fear.

And so he pleaded with God. As Moses, later in the Old Testament, led the people towards the promised land, he plead with God to be allowed to go into the land.

See that in the middle there, verse 25, he pleaded with God, I pleaded with the Lord, please let me go over and see the land. But that's not what happened, that wasn't. Account of Elijah, a qurim.

[5 : 39] And then later on in the Old Testament, there's the very famous account of Elijah, confronting the false prophets, hundreds of them on the top of Mount Carmel.

And he pleaded with God to answer him. Oh Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God and Israel, that I'm your servant, that I've done all these things that you were.

Answer me, oh Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, oh Lord, are God, and that you've turned their hearts back. And so you've got this language of pleading, all over the Bible.

And you find it in our experience as well, we're pleading with God for help when we're struggling. We're pleading with God for family and friends, when we see them suffering.

We're pleading with God for guidance when we feel confused. And as a church, we plead with God, we plead with God to draw more and more people to faith in Jesus.

[6 : 37] This is just a massive part of what prayer is about. It's a massive part of what we do as a church. And here, I thought maybe it was a good opportunity to just share that prayer is actually a big part of my job.

It's part of a minister's job. A pastor's job is to pray for his people. So I have a prayer diary and you are all in it. And so I have it spread out over four weeks, five days a week, four days, five days a week, four weeks, and a cycle that I just go through again and again.

And it goes through all the congregation, it goes through all the different areas of our village. And there's probably lots of better ways to do it. Sometimes I forget a day and I have to catch up and there's probably lots of better ways to do it.

But the point I'm trying to say is that a big part of my job is to pray for you, to plead with God for you. And that's what your elders do.

They plead with God for you. That's what we do in a Thursday evening. That's what we do at the Zoom prayer meeting once a month on a Tuesday morning at seven o'clock. We are pleading with God to build up his church, to draw more people to faith.

[7 : 50] Prayer is all about pleading. Now, the fact that prayer involves pleading and has a very important theological lesson and a very important practical lesson.

Very important theological lesson and a very important practical lesson. The theological lesson is all in relation to the sovereignty of God. Now, as a church, we would say that we are Calvinists.

And that's just simply another way of saying that we are reformed. And what that means is that we believe that the truths that were emphasized at the Reformation are by people like John Calvin and others, we believe that they are an accurate summary of what the Bible teaches.

And so that's the key point. We're not saying that the reformers are perfect. We're saying that what they taught reflects the Bible. And so we agree with that as a church. We are a Calvinist church.

We're a reformed church. And so that's emphasizing that God is all, by the reformers, is that God is sovereign. And so that's emphasizing that God is all powerful, that He has all authority, that He is in control of everything, and we are totally and utterly dependent on Him for everything.

[9 : 10] And so that's a core teaching of our church. And the consequences of that is that it means that we cannot save ourselves. We can't accomplish anything without God.

We're totally reliant on His grace and His mercy. God is sovereign. And so we depend on Him for everything.

Now, here is where we have to remember that Calvinism is a bit like chicken. No, let me explain. Calvinism is a bit like chicken because roast chicken is amazing.

Love roast chicken. We're actually having roast chicken today, which I'm very excited about. Love roast chicken. Half cooked chicken is awful.

And remember once going somewhere for a burger, chicken burger, took a bite, tasted fine at the edge, went into the middle of the burger, not cooked. Disgusting.

[10 : 09] It's making me gag even thinking about it. Half cooked chicken is awful. And that's why Calvinism is like chicken. Fully cooked Calvinism is amazing.

Half cooked Calvinism is awful. What do I mean by that? Well, you see this especially when it applies to prayer because it's so easy for us to think if God's purposes, if God's in control, if He's all powerful, if He does everything, if God's purposes cannot be stopped or thwarted, if He knows everything already, then why bother praying?

Why do we have to ask God for anything? Or we think, well, we can pray, but we don't need to put much effort in and we don't need to expect very much and there's hardly any sense of pleading with God because what He's in control, He's going to do it anyway.

And it's so easy to fall into that mindset, but it's half cooked Calvinism in the sense that it's just a very truncated and misguided understanding of the sovereignty of God.

And the reason that it's terrible is because it's basically us putting God into a box and we're leaving Him to one side because we're saying, well, God's sovereign, but actually, well, therefore, I don't need to bother with Him.

- [11 : 28] And so outwardly, we might be saying God's in control, but we're saying, well, but why pray, why plead, why strive? And that's actually reducing our view of God's sovereignty. It's putting Him in a box where we are judging God and deciding what He can and cannot do and deciding how we should approach Him or not approach Him. In other words, it's basically setting our relationship with God on His terms.
- And you see this very often. I have seen it very often in relation to the whole question of evangelism, where we might talk about reaching out with the gospel. We've got an OM mission team coming in August. We're going to do a Christianity Explored in the autumn. We're putting up new signs outside the church. We want to invite people and encourage people. And some of us, we can't do anything without Him. It's not only the Holy Spirit who can save.
- And I've come across that mindset many, many times. It's half-cooked Calvinism. And half-cooked Calvinism is like half-cooked chicken.
- [12 : 27] It's awful. Half-cooked Calvinism says, God is sovereign. God has all authority. Therefore, there's nothing I can do.
- So I'm not going to do anything. Fully-cooked Calvinism says, God is sovereign. God has all authority.
- Therefore, nothing matters more than that I listen to Him and obey His voice. Half-cooked Calvinism says, Only God can save people in Carlaway.
- Therefore, there's no point praying. Fully-cooked Calvinism says, Only God can save people in Carlaway. Therefore, we are going to plead with Him to do it.
- And the key difference is in the posture of these two approaches. Because half-cooked Calvinism stands over God and abdicates responsibility and basically says, Well, God can do it. God will do it.
- [13 : 24] And even though God's commanded me to do stuff, to go out with the gospel, doesn't matter because He's going to do it. And we're putting God in our box and abdicating our responsibility. Fully-cooked Calvinism falls down before the sovereign God and begs Him to have mercy, pleads with Him to work among us and recognizes that if God says, Go and make disciples of all nations, then we'll him and look to him.
- And we're going to serve him and obey him and look to him to bless us. And that's why prayer is always to be grounded on the character of God, on the commands of God, and on the covenant promises of God.
- You see that so clearly in Psalm 27. It starts off in verse 21. He says, David said, The Lord's my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord's the stronghold of my life. Whom shall I be afraid? That's all David's thinking is grounded on the character of God. He knows who God is, so he runs to him for help. David also bases his prayer on the commands of God.
- He says, Lord, you said, Seek my face. That's what I'm doing. I am going to seek your face. What you've commanded, I am praying. I want you to be obeyed.
- [14 : 43] And all of that's grounded in the covenant promises of God. Look at these verses from 7 to 14. Can you see a word that comes up again and again and again? It's that word, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord.
- And when you see that word, Lord, in capitals, it's referring to the covenant name of God. The fact that God is the one who makes promises that he is never, ever going to break.
- And the practical lesson of all of that is that this should shape the way we pray. And so as we pray, we are praying, basing our prayers on the character of God, which are to our community as in promises of God.

So as we look to reach out to our community, as we look to grow in faith and towards maturity as a church family, we can pray, Lord, you're merciful and gracious and powerful.

Please draw people to faith and build us up as a church family. We can say to God, you commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations. So please help us. And as we go for it, as we plan our mission week in August, as we think about Christianity explored, as we look for ways to invite people to church each week, please help us. You've commanded this. Help us with it.

[16 : 04] And as we pray, we rest on God's promises and God has promised his power to his church as we reach out. He's promised to be with us. He's promised to empower us.

And we are pleading with him to keep his promise. All of this is simply to say that when we talk about prayer in terms of pleading, we're simply saying that we take prayer seriously.

We're not half-hearted. We're never half-cooked. And so we must remember that in prayer, we're pleading.

But the second thing we need to remember is that prayer is pleasing. I love the contrasting language that you see in Psalm 27. On the one hand, David describes the threat of opposition and struggle that he is encountering.

And the language is very graphic. He talks about, by his parents, he talks about adversaries, he talks about false witnesses rising against him, he talks about how they breathe out violence.

[17 : 13] So the image there is very, very powerful, very graphic. And you think, David is in a nightmare situation in this Psalm. But that contrasts so powerfully, that language of adversity, contrasts so powerfully with the language that he uses to describe his relationship with God.

In verse four, he talks about gazing on the beauty of the Lord. In verse five, he talks about God hiding him, concealing him, lifting him.

And in verse six, he speaks about shouts of joy, music, song, making melody to the Lord. And so in other words, it's teaching us that in all the horrible anguish that David's facing, he turns to the Lord and he experiences light and beauty and joy.

And it's a great reminder that prayer is pleasing. In other words, prayer is pleasant. Prayer should be a pleasure.

So often it's not. And that's something that I struggle with all the time. And sometimes prayer just feels like a battle more than a pleasure.

[18 : 26] And I think so much of the reason that that is something that I experience is because I think of prayer in the wrong way. So often I think of prayer in terms of guilt and duty and obligation and fear of failure.

And I think, well, you know, I better go and put better pray. And there's something difficult coming up, better pray. And when we think like that, prayer becomes a wee bit like when there's awful weather coming and you think, right, I need to go to the garden and I need to put all the toys away, put the bikes in the shed, make sure that everything's covered.

Maybe you have to move some flower pots because there's a gale coming and we get everything in order and we tie everything down, close the window, shut the curtains, we pray to God that our prayers are like just getting everything sorted because a storm is coming.

And that's maybe a helpful way to look at it in a very limited kind of way. There's elements of that which are true. But what we must remember is that prayer is not just hiding under a tree or hiding behind a wall when there's a storm.

Prayer is actually cutting open the clouds and letting blue sky and sunshine pour down upon us, even in the midst of a storm.

[19 : 51] So for example, you might go to work tomorrow morning and you feel tired and demotivated and frustrated and you're battling a sense of inadequacy. You can pray to God and gaze on his beauty.

You can take two minutes to enjoy the light of his goodness shining over you, remembering that he's with you, that he's got a plan and a purpose for you, that his love for you is a goal for you in this life and the eternity that he's preparing for us is going to be amazing.

You can spend two minutes allowing a break in the clouds for all that truth to shine upon you. When you're having a rubbish week, you can do like verse five, you can hide in his shelter.

You can be concealed by him, lifted up and helped by him when you're struggling. And when you need a boost of energy, you can sing to him in prayer. Either you can sing on your own or you can put on a song, a Psalm or a hymn or a worship song that you love and you can sing along to God and be re-energized and refreshed.

It's all reminding us that if prayer is unpleasant, it means we're misunderstanding it. We're not thinking about it accurately. We're approaching it in the wrong way. Prayer is a break in the clouds. It's a song in the storm. It's a rest on the journey.

[21 : 18] It's a hand on your back helping you. And this Psalm captures that so powerfully and it's emphasizing to us all that if you're a Christian or if you become one, as we follow Jesus, two things are always true.

There is going to be unavoidable exposure to stuff that is rubbish. That is what life will bring. The Bible never hides that, never pretends it's otherwise. There's always going to be exposure to stuff day to day, week to week that's rubbish.

But that's only half the story because the other truth is that as Christians, if you are one, if you become one, you have unbreakable, unlimited access to someone who is so beautiful.

His face is prayer. You can speak to God. His face will shine upon you. Prayer is pleasing. Prayer is an astonishing privilege.

So we want to remember that in prayer we're pleading. We want to remember that prayer is pleasing. But most of all, I want you to remember that God is pleased.

[22 : 28] And that's so crucial to remember because so often we think he's not, we think he's disappointed with us and frustrated with us and that shrouds prayer in kind of an atmosphere of negativity and we pray out of guilt and we kind of feel reluctant to pray because we feel like we're failing, that God's not impressed anyway and it's not going to go particularly well.

And that all comes from a mindset where we think that God is frowning at us. And maybe we think that God is frowning at us because we frequently encounter people who are frowning at us or maybe you've had that in your past.

The fundamental theological truth I want you to take home today is that God's not frowning at you. God's not frowning at you.

In this Psalm, David speaks about seeking God's face. He wants to seek God's face. Your face Lord, do I seek? Now that language is what we call, here's an enormous word that I'll need plenty space for, it's what we call an anthropomorphism.

Anthropomorphism. I love words like that because it makes me sound so intelligent. The Bible uses to me an anthropomorphism is when the Bible uses human language to describe something about God.

[23 : 47] And the Psalms do it all the time, it'll talk about God's face, God's hand, God's arm, God's feet. Now God doesn't have face, hands, arm and feet. God is spirit. God doesn't have a physical body in that sense.

But all of this language teaches us about God. So God's hand and arm speaks of his power. God's face speaks of God's presence.

And so that language of God's face reminds us that prayer brings us into the presence of God, if you like it brings us face to face with God. The key question is this, what's God's face doing when you come to him in prayer?

The answer is he's smiling. In other words, God's happy that you're praying to him, he's delighted to hear your voice.

He's pleased to listen to your prayers. And that's so crucial to remember, prayer is not about averting God's frown. Prayer is about enjoying God's smile.

[24 : 51] And you know, sometimes you can pray simply by bowing your head and smiling back to God, even when you don't have the words to convey how you're feeling. But as we think about that, it's so important to get it the right way round.

Because it's very easy to think that God is smiling because you're praying. And we think, okay God, if I start praying, then that'll please God, he'll start smiling. And we think like that because the plant, we think, oh that's going to please God, when our prayer life feels healthy and we're regular and focused and disciplined, we think, oh that's going to please God, so he's going to smile.

And then the opposite is true, where things aren't going well, and we're forgetting to pray or struggling to pray, or we feel like we don't even know where to start with prayer, we think that God will stop smiling.

And instead he'll be frowning. So we think, good habits equals smiling God, bad habits equals frowning God. That is not true.

Because if you think like that, you are grounding God's pleasure on your performance. Basically saying, do a good job, God will smile. Do a bad job, he'll frown.

[26 : 01] That is not the Gospel. The Gospel is so much better than that. The Gospel is not grounded on the fact that you need to impress God.

The Gospel is grounded on the fact that if you're a Christian or if you become one, God is smiling at you forevermore. He's pleased with you.

And so it's not the case if you pray, he will be pleased. The truth is the other way around, he is pleased. So pray and keep praying.

When you get in a plane in Lewis, it reminds you that there's never a non-sunny day in Lewis. The minute you get about the clouds, you realize the sun's shining all the time. And the same is true with stress and disappointments of life, obscures there.

And the busyness and stress and disappointments of life obscure that smile, but it never takes it away. His smile is always there and prayer breaks the clouds and reveals God's ever-smiling face again.

[27 : 15] Now, as I say all that, you might be thinking, but that's not what David says in this Psalm. And that's not how David's speaking. Because in the Psalm, you'll see here, David's pleading in verses 27 and verses 8 and 9.

He's pleading with God. He's saying, don't turn me away, don't hide your face, don't cast me off. And so as you read those verses, David is in fear of God's frown. He's saying, don't hide your face, don't turn me away, don't cast me off, don't forsake me.

And we think to ourselves, well, that's surely how it works. That we can displease God, we can let God down. Our sins deserve all of these things. Our sins, our failures mean that God should hide his face from us.

He should turn us away. And there's no way that God's happy with all the mistakes that I've made in my life. And David comes to God afraid that God is going to hide his face, turn away, cast him off. And we think, well, surely that's the way it is because we let God down.

How can we know that God's not going to do those things to us? How can we say that he's always smiling? Well, the reason we can say that is because this is one of the examples where we discover that we know more now than what David knew when he wrote this Psalm.

[28 : 25] David is in fear of being cast off and forsaken. He prays that it won't happen. We know more than him. The reason we know it won't happen, that won't happen.

And the reason we know it won't happen is because it did happen. It happened, but not to David and not to us.

It happened to Jesus. The hiding of God's face happened. The turning away happened.

The casting off happened. The forsaking happened. It all happened on the cross. All of that was done to Jesus. And the reason it happened was because our sin was placed upon him.

He took it in our place. And if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian, it means that you are united to Jesus. And that means that when God looks at you, he doesn't see your failings.

[29 : 30] He doesn't see everything that's gone wrong. Instead, he sees the beauty and perfection of his son. He sees the one who is forever pleasing to God. Or think of it this way around.

God the Father is in heaven and his son Jesus is at his side. As the Father looks at Jesus, what do you think he does? Does he frown or sigh or roll his eyes?

Of course he doesn't. He smiles. And every single person who trusts in Jesus is united to him, cleansed by him, secured in him and God the Father is smiling.

It's just a very last thing. And this is reminding us of an incredibly important lesson. It's just a very last thing I'm going to say. It's reminding us that if you're maybe not yet a Christian or not sure, or pretty unsure and thinking, well actually, yeah, I'm not a Christian and I don't really want to be, all of this is reminding us that rejecting Jesus doesn't mean that you're accepting God's frown.

Some people think like that. They think I'm not good enough. I'm not cut out for this. I'm not going to reach the standard. So you just think, well, God's going to hate me. I deserve it. I accept it. And you accept God's frown.

[30 : 48] Pushing Jesus away is not accepting God's frown. Pushing Jesus away is rejecting God's smile.

And that's a tragic, crazy thing to do. So please don't do it. And instead, start praying.

Pray that Jesus would save you and keep on praying for the rest of your life. Amen.