

Pouring Out Your Heart

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Back to Sam 62 and over the next three weeks we're going to do a short study on prayer. And one of the reasons I want to do that is because prayer is a subject we need to keep coming back to.

It's a subject we should study regularly for at least two reasons. One is because every Christian and every church needs to pray. But the other reason is because every Christian and every church struggles to pray.

And maybe I can start with a question and ask you how does that word prayer make you feel? I'm going to give you some options.

Does it make you feel a sense of pressure or a sense of peace? Does it make you feel a sense of guilt or gladness, failure or freedom, doubt or delight, cynicism, or satisfaction?

If you are anything like me, you are mostly over here. And I think that's true for every Christian.

[1 : 10] With prayer we gravitate to that side. We feel pressure, we think, oh, I don't pray enough. We feel guilt. Oh, I'm so, this is not what I wanted to be. We feel a sense of failure. We doubt.

We think, I don't even know if God hears my prayers or would want to hear my prayers. And sometimes we're even like, well, I don't even know if prayer works. And my hope is that our series will take us from all of that and take us much more over here because a biblical understanding of prayer, freedom, delight and satisfaction that prayer gives to us.

So we're going to do that. And our study is called, poor, please persist. And we're going to look at each of those words in turn over the next three weeks.

And as we do that, I think that I hope that these words are going to help us understand the nature of prayer and the practice of prayer and the purpose of prayer.

In other words, it helps us answer these three questions. What is prayer? How do we pray? And why should we pray? And so we're going to use those three questions as our guide this morning.

[2 : 18] And we'll use them again over the next two Sundays. So this week, we're focusing on the first word, the word poor. And we find that word in the Psalm that we read in verse eight.

Trust in him at all times. Oh, people, pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us.

So if we're asking the question, first of all, what is prayer? We're thinking about the nature of prayer.

This verse is incredibly helpful. At first glance, the verse is giving us words of instruction.

You can see you've got the language of imperatives, we're told to trust to pour. This is stuff that we're being told to do in the Psalms. But as that language of instruction is presented to us, we're also being given a wonderful definition of what prayer is.

Because prayer is simply pouring out your heart before. It's worth just going through it word by word. Prayer is about the heart.

[3 : 23] And that's so crucial to remember because it's reminding us that prayer is an internal thing. It's not about external stuff. It's not about rituals or outward religion or going through certain motions.

So often prayer gets reduced to that. You see that in lots of other global religions. There's this kind of like almost robotic approach to prayer where prayer must be done at certain times.

Pointing in a certain direction, doing it a certain way, reciting certain words. But we can do the same. Even as Christians, our prayer lives can very quickly fall into a kind of going through the motions, ticking the right boxes, meeting certain requirements that we or others have placed.

But repeating words with your lips, pointing a certain direction, getting yourself into a certain posture, none of that is what makes prayer prayer. What makes prayer prayer is the fact that it's a matter of your heart.

It's engaging your heart. It's engaging us at our very core. It's concerned with who we really are. It's addressing our deepest needs.

[4 : 35] So prayer is a matter of the heart. But it's also a matter of your heart. And that's also crucial because prayer is not about being conformed to the styles or the expectations of somebody else.

Prayer, in other words, is about your needs, your circumstances, your struggles, your joys, your spiritual well-being, your highs and lows.

In other words, prayer is never about you trying to be someone else. And that's so crucial for us to remember. It's about you.

It's about coming to God as you are. In fact, that's teaching us that prayer is utterly focused on who you really are.

And so it's about your heart. It's about your heart. It's about pouring out your heart. And I think that language is so beautiful and so helpful.

[5 : 46] It's reminding us that prayer is not about trying to make out that you're this thing or the next thing. It's about pouring out everything that's already there in your heart. In other words, prayer is never about hiding stuff or concealing stuff or pretending stuff or trying to impress God with a good outward look or even a good inward look.

Instead, prayer is just about opening our hearts before God. And as we do so, everything that's in them just gets poured out. And I think this is where it's so important.

It just shows us how penetrating prayer really is, because if our hearts is where our two identity lies, if that's where we find who we really are, which I think everybody in the world agrees no matter what they're, and they're real Thomas or they're real you, there's a sense in which everything else in our lives is a kind of, like a mask that's there to make us look a wee bit better.

Our clothes are there to make us look better. Our presentation, whether it's our hair or our physique or whatever, our school grades, our CV, our possessions, our car, our roles and responsibilities, all of these things are good things.

All of these things can display a good side of us. They can give a good impression. But to get to your heart, you have to strip all of that away.

[7 : 17] And that's what prayer is all about. That's the level it gets to. Prayer takes us behind all the masks, all the barriers, all the adornment that we might put up.

And it's the moment when we just pour our hearts out to God. And that means that prayer is one of the rare occasions when we really are ourselves.

Because our hearts are being opened, our hearts are being poured out. And we do all of that before Him, before God.

Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God. And to God, we're able to just tell Him everything.

I remember a friend of mine used to say, I love that I can go to bed at night, put my head on the pillow and talk to God. And it's so important that we remember that, that when it comes to prayer, we are bringing it all to God.

[8 : 32] And so we must remember, we don't pray in order to get access to God. We pray because we have access to God. So it's easy to think that prayer is like knocking on God's door. It's like going to God and trying to get His attention and saying, Lord, please listen to me.

But that's not really what prayer is like. In fact, prayer is not like that at all. Prayer is not a knock at God's door. Prayer is a conversation at God's fireside.

Where we can come and sit with Him and talk to Him, because we are welcome before Him. And so in our prayers, we pour out our hearts to God.

And the crucial point here is that it's only if we're pouring out our hearts to Him, that it really can be prayer. In other words, if prayer, if it's not directed towards God, then it's not really prayer at all.

And only God can be the recipient of our prayers. Only God is worthy. Only God is suitable. Only God is capable of hearing our prayers.

[9 : 44] It's all directed to Him. And all of that is teaching us a very important, completely bound up with the nature of God.

And I think that's such an important thing for us to remember. To understand what prayer is, we need to understand who God is and what God is like. Because God's nature and the nature of our relationship with Him is all crucial for defining what prayer is.

And that's emphasized so beautifully in Psalm 62. Look at some of the words that this Psalm uses to describe God. Verse 2, He is rock, salvation, fortress.

Same comes up again in verse 6, rock, salvation, fortress. 7 and 8, refuge, refuge.

All of that is the language of stability, security, and safety. It pictures God as this immovable rock, this mighty fortress, this sure and certain salvation, this beautiful refuge.

[10:57] And the amazing thing is that all of these are what God wants to be for us. We often say this, the Bible is full of great words like rock, salvation, fortress, all that kind of stuff.

But the best words in the Bible are the small words. And there's a wonderful small word in this Psalm. It's my rock, my salvation, my fortress, my rock, my salvation, my fortress, my refuge, a refuge for us.

That through Jesus, through trusting in Jesus, we have this beautiful relationship with God, a relationship of protection, of dependence, of security.

And that's why we can pour our hearts out to God. And that's why prayer is the one place where we can truly be ourselves.

And that's so, so important to remember. You think, you know, the idea of pouring out our hearts, sometimes we'll say, you know, oh, I went and I met with a friend or met with my boss or I went to the doctor and I poured my heart out. Well, that's only ever kind of half through. I don't think we would ever pour out everything to somebody else.

[12:16] But we can with God. We can show it all to him because he actually knows it already anyway.

God's fireside is the one place where we can truly be ourselves. And we can do that because prayer is safe.

And it's safe because it's all these things. He's a rock, he's a fortress, he's a refuge. He's utterly dependable. He is impeccably faithful. He's infinitely stable and secure.

And that's just part of why knowing Jesus is so, so amazing because he's just the refuge, the shelter, the security that every one of us desperately needs.

And that's such an important grounded on who God is, not on what God gives. And that's such a crucial thing to recognize because we so often get that the wrong way around.

[13:18] We think prayer is just in terms of getting stuff that prayers about what God gives and prayer is the way to get to that. And so we think of prayer like a transaction rather than a relationship.

We think of it in terms of getting stuff from God rather than in terms of thinking about getting to know God more. And yes, it's true. It's absolutely true. God gives us many, many wonderful blessings.

And that does come into prayer, but it's not what prayer is all about. It's not the foundation of what prayer is. So do we pray because God needs to better understand what we want from him?

No. We pray because we need to better understand what God wants from us. Do we pray so that God will give us our desires?

No. We pray so that we can give our desires to God. Do we pray because God needs to know what we need in all our circumstances? No, we pray because in all our circumstances, we need to know that we need God.

[14:25] And it's so easy to get that wrong. It's a bit like the difference between going to the hairdresser and going to the hospital. When you go to the hairdresser, you're getting something nice, something that you want, and most importantly of all, the hairdresser listens to you.

And many people have walked out of the hairdresser and everyone else is thinking, I wish the barber hadn't listened to what they were saying. Prayer is not like that. Prayer is more like going to the hospital.

When you go to the hospital, you talk to the doctor. You tell the doctor everything about your circumstances. You tell the doctor your desires and the doctor listens. But the key difference between the hairdresser and the hospital is that the hairdresser listens to your instructions.

At the hospital, you have to listen to the doctor's instructions. And sometimes what we're told is not what we want, but it's absolutely what we need.

Hairdressers are there to make life pleasant and they're a great part of life. But they're there to make life pleasant. A hospital is there to make life possible.

[15:42] And that's how we need to view prayer. It's so easy to approach prayer as though God is our hairdresser. As though we come to God, we tell Him everything that we want, and He's there to

follow our instructions.

And He's there to align His purposes to fit our expectations. That is never what prayer is about, and thank God that is not what prayer is about. Because prayer is about pouring our hearts out to God. It's about handing over to Him our longings and desires. It's about casting our cares onto Him. It's entrusting Him with our hopes and dreams.

And Sam, 62, sums that up to Him at all times. Some people approach prayer as though it's a matter of taste, which is asking God for all the stuff we want.

Some people approach prayer as though it's a matter of testing God. We want to see how faithful He is, or we want to see how fervent we are. But both of these are wrong. Prayer is not about taste, it's not about tests, it's about trust.

[16:47] Prayer brings us into conversation with a God who is utterly trustworthy. And prayer is amazing because it means that we can pour our hearts out to Him. And all of you know that this is true.

All of you know that this is true, because at the times in life when our heart feels like it's about to burst like that balloon, when we feel anxious and worried when things are really looking bad, what is the one thing that we all instinctively do? We all pray.

Even if we haven't prayed for years, the circumstances and pressures of life push us to run to God in prayer.

What about the practice of prayer? How do we do it? Well, the how of prayer is often something that can be very confusing, it's often something that we can get wrong. Sometimes we think that prayer has to be very profound, so it's all about using elaborate language, big words, impressive statements.

Sometimes we think that prayer has to be very, very polished, so all neat and tidy, excellent routine, very eloquent. And sometimes we think that prayer needs to be very prescribed, so they have to fit a certain template, church imposes.

[18:03] And these things aren't wrong, often prayer is very profound, and it's okay for prayer to be polished and eloquent, that's a good thing. And patterns for prayer can actually be very, very helpful.

But all of this runs the risk of making it seem as though prayer is the activity of the experts. And that leaves the rest of us feeling like we are rubbish at it.

And that's where the language of pouring is so, so helpful. And that language of pouring that we have here, I think is just something we need to reflect on in terms of how to pray.

And it teaches us three important things, pouring is messy. Pouring is messy.

When I pour out that glass, it makes a mess on the floor. And that is a great reminder that it's okay for prayer to be messy.

[19:11] Prayer is just honest and raw and open. We're just telling God about our lives, telling God about how we feel.

And we're just laying it all before Him, the good, the bad, the ugly, the joys, the sorrows, the confusion. We're just laying it all before God.

And if you want to see the best example of that kind of mess, you look in the book of Psalms. Because all the struggles and battles and worries of life. The Psalms are amazing because at one level they're a work of art, they're beautiful poetry, but at another level they're so messy because the situations they describe are all the struggles that we face.

We see that in Psalm 62. David feels like he's getting battered in terms of his circumstances. In Psalm 63 he feels thirsty as though he's in a dry wilderness.

He cannot find God. Psalm 64, he comes to God with all his complaints. And you go to all the other Psalms, you catch the same thing. Sometimes it's way more graphic than the imagery of these three examples.

[20:21] The Psalms capture all the messiness of life. And that's part of what makes the Psalms so beautiful and helpful. It's part of what makes prayer so beautiful and helpful.

If you think, I don't really know how to pray, well, all you do is you just pour it all out to God. And it's okay if it's messy. So prayer is messy, but prayer is also targeted.

Because when you're pouring something, you're targeting something. So when I poured that glass, I'm pointing it towards the floor. And that's what it's going to hit. It hits the platform. If I poured it on the table, it would hit that.

If I poured it on the lectern or myself, it would hit that target. So it's not just random splashing everywhere when we talk about pouring. Pouring is deliberate. And you'll see that when you pour your juice or whatever you have with your lunch after the service. And it's reminding us that in terms of praying, yes, it can be messy, but it's full of ourselves to him. We're leaving everything with him.

[21 : 23] And that's a good question to ask, you know, when you think of your prayer, you think, are you just leaving a few drips with God? Maybe just mentioning a couple of things here and there, but actually thinking, well, I'll just give God a few drips of my life, but actually I'm fine on my own.

Or are we pouring out our hearts to him? And sometimes that might just be a sigh. Sometimes the more we pour out our hearts, the less we know what to say.

That is absolutely fine. Because we're just bringing it all before God, whether we've got a lot to say or a little to say, we're leaving everything with him.

So pouring is messy, pouring is targeted. Pouring is also comprehensive because I better not do it. But if I really did pour this glass out, I would empty it and just leave it all out on the floor.

And that's so important for us to remember when we're praying to God, we just pray about every situation, every struggle, every experience. So from something as big as what your career is going to be, to something as little as the first email that you have to reply to tomorrow morning, we can bring it all before God in prayer.

[22 : 31] And again, the Psalms are amazing because they've got such a varied example, examples of what the experiences of life can bring. You see in 68, you've got this great example.

At the start, it speaks about David being attacked, and he feels like he's just about to be knocked over like a tottering pillar, a tottering fence. But later in the Psalm, there's the temptation of riches, of power, of influence.

And so often we can face these two struggles. We're attacked and we're enticed. And the stuff that David experienced in his real life, military opposition, and the difficulties of robbery, wealth and all that kind of stuff, always remember, all of that's a shadow.

The Old Testament stuff is always a shadow of the full reality that all of this is pointing to the reality of the spiritual battle that we face, whereby day to day, week to week, we get attacked by the kingdom of evil with doubts and with disappointments and struggles and weakness.

And we get enticed by all the temptations of the world around us. We're always getting attacked, always getting enticed, and we can pour all of this out before God every day and leave it with Him.

[23 : 47] It's reminding us that prayer never involves pretending that everything's fine. Prayer involves pouring out everything that we're struggling with. And the great example in the Old Testament of this is Hannah.

Some of you will remember Hannah. She was Samuel's mother. She was childless for much of her adult life, so she was crushed by the pain of infertility.

She was mocked by her husband's second wife, and her husband gave her this spectacularly unhelpful advice when he said, isn't being married to me better than having 10 children?

And Hannah takes it all to God in prayer, and it's described so beautifully in verses that I want to read in 1 Samuel 10. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and whipped bitterly, get your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli the priest observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart, only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman, and Eli said to her, how long will you go on being drunk?

[24 : 57] Put your wine away from you. But Hannah answered, know my Lord, I'm a woman, troubled in spirit, I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I've been pouring out my soul before the Lord.

Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I've been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation. That is an amazing example of what prayer is all about.

Last of all, why should we pray? Time is running out, oh, time is running out very fast. Let's go through this quickly. I just want to say two things about the purpose of prayer.

Number one, prayer relieves the pressure on our hearts. So that's what we tried to show the children with the balloon. One lesson that life teaches you is that all of our hearts have a limited capacity.

We think that we have unlimited capacity, but life teaches us that that's not the case. And we reach the point where we can't take any more. Every heart has a breaking point.

[26 : 03] And one of the key things I want us to take away from today is that prayer is the place where that pressure gets relieved. The pressure building in your heart or the tension building in your back, prayer will release that pressure, because we're just bringing it to God and laying it before Him.

So prayer relieves the pressure in our hearts. But prayer does something else as well. Prayer replaces the pressure in your heart.

In other words, prayer doesn't just empty your heart of burdens. Prayer fills your heart with something else. And that's where we discover one more thing from this beautiful word, poor, because the Bible doesn't just use that word to describe what we do before God.

It also uses that word to describe what God is doing to us as well. Romans 5, 1-5, therefore, since we've been justified by faith, we've peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice in hope with the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

[27 : 26] Endurance produces character, character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been giving to us.

This might be a very simplistic way of looking at it, but if you pour out your heart to God, you're making room for something else.

And what God wants to fill your heart with is a knowledge of just how much He loves you. And so that language of pouring doesn't just describe what we are to do to God.

It actually tells us what He wants to do to us. He wants to fill our hearts with a knowledge of His love, His peace, His joy.

Prayer is reminding us that we can empty our burdens before the Lord, and our hearts can be replenished by His incredible love. So please either start praying, resume praying, or keep praying.

[28 : 39] And as you do, pour out your heart.