

The Priorities of Prayer
Sermon by Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – November 13, 2016

I. INTRODUCTION

Well, as we begin today, I want to start by asking you to do a quick self-assessment of your prayer life. As you know, we've been focusing on prayer for five or six weeks now and are closing in on the end of this study. Lord willing, next week will be our final message on prayer, but that in no way means we're going to leave prayer behind and move on to bigger and better things. My hope and prayer is that through this study you've seen that prayer is the core...the heartbeat...of our relationship with God and the key to walking by the Spirit and living lives worthy of the great calling we've received. As such we should never move beyond prayer, but rather move ever deeper and deeper into it as we grow in the Lord.

Today our focus is going to be on the priorities of prayer...what Scripture teaches us to pray about. So let's get back to that self-assessment. I'd like you to think back over the past week and take a moment to consider what role prayer played in your day-to-day living. Would you say you lived and breathed it every moment of every day? Would you say you prayed a few times each day? Would you say that most days you got really busy and forgot to pray until you were dropping into bed at night? Would you say that you really haven't prayed meaningfully at all since we prayed together last Sunday? If you had to rate your prayer life on a scale of 1 to 10, what number would you choose? My guess is that among the group of us gathered here today, we'd have numbers all over the scale.

Would you be surprised that I wouldn't give myself a 10? Aren't pastors supposed to have completely arrived when it comes to prayer? Well, I have news for you: If I was feeling generous I'd give myself a 6, but being brutally honest I'm probably closer to a 4 or 5. I often get busy with my to-do list and get tunnel vision until God lets me hit a brick wall. Then I hear Him saying: "HELLO, I'm still here. Did you know you can't do this without Me. Things would go a lot better and you'd be much more effective if you'd just take a moment and ask Me to guide, direct and empower you in everything you're doing...and if you'd continue to let me lead

you as you go.” But I am rejoicing to see the improvement that has taken place over the years and I’m so grateful that God has shown me where he’s leading me as I learn to walk more and more closely with him.

So hopefully you’ve come up with your own number on the prayer scale by now. If so, I’d like all the 10’s to come stand over here and all the 1’s to come stand over here, and we’re going to have a prayer meeting for you both! Just kidding. 😊 But hopefully this self-assessment has given you an idea of where you are in your prayer life and prepared you to consider what needs to change and how prayer could play more of a central role in your life. I really want to encourage you to ask these types of questions today and this week and begin praying fervently that God would give you his view of prayer.

I’d also like you to think for a moment about what you pray about. When you do pray, what do you talk to God most about? Are you organized or disorganized in your conversations with him? Do you mostly ask him for things or do you spend a lot of time praising him for who he is, enjoying him and thanking him for what he’s doing in your life? If we’re honest, I think all of us could use some guidance on how to pray about what’s important to God and how to pray more in line with his purposes.

I don’t know about you, but I could use a little more structure in my focused prayer times so that I don’t just wander aimlessly and get overwhelmed with the sheer volume of things I could pray about. So that’s what today is about. We’re going to answer the questions: What’s a healthy way to structure my focused prayer times? And what are God’s priorities in prayer? What does he teach us are important things to pray about? We’re going to get really practical today, and I’m going to give you some great tools from Scripture to use as you pray.

II. A BIBLICAL STRUCTURE FOR FOCUSED PRAYER (TACKSI)

So let’s tackle the structure question first. What’s a healthy way to structure our focused prayer times so that we don’t wander aimlessly and get lost in the swirling vortex of possible things to pray for? What I’m talking about here are the times when we set aside a block of time in a quiet place to seek God in prayer...that’s when a structure to our prayers becomes really helpful. Obviously when we’re just having a continual conversation with God as we go about our

daily business, we don't need a structure or pattern to guide us...we're just sharing needs, asking for wisdom and power, and allowing God to lead in everything we're doing. We don't need a structure to guide our moment-by-moment conversation with a friend.

But for me personally, I find it very helpful to go into an extended time of prayer with a structure to keep me focused, keep me praying according to God's purposes and design, and keep me from feeling overwhelmed and drifting off into a deep snooze, a daydream, or a swirling vortex...none of which are very productive! Now there are lots of tools out there to help in this process. You're probably familiar with a lot of them. The acronym **ACTS** is probably one of the most well-known, standing for: **Adoration – Confession – Thanksgiving – Supplication**.

With ACTS, you start out by adoring God and praising him for who he is; then you move on to self-assessment, confessing any known sin and asking forgiveness; then you spend time thanking God for his work in your life and the lives of others; and finally you turn to specific prayer requests for yourself and others...what we call supplication. ACTS is easy to remember and it helps keep us from our typical tendency to spend most of our time asking for things. Some people also use the Lord's Prayer as a structure for their extended prayer times and, of course, there are several other acronyms out there if you want to do some "Googling" this week.

But today I'd like to share with you an acronym that I've found is very Scriptural, has a good, natural flow to it, and covers a few more priorities of prayer than ACTS. This one is called **TACSI**. Royce Curtis, the primary instructor for my pastor Convergence training, shared this with us recently and then we some time alone in prayer using it. I found it really helpful and it seemed that each section just naturally flowed into the next. I did make a slight modification to his acronym though, adding one letter and inventing a new word to cover Jesus' instructions to pray for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done.

So I want to spend some time now briefly talking about each letter of the acronym and discussing which priority of prayer each one represents. Then I want to challenge you to try using it sometime this coming week. My revised acronym is **TACKSI**, standing for: **Thanksgiving – Adoration – Confession –**

Kingdomation – Supplication – Intercession. Wait a minute. Kingdomation?! That's my new word and it's gonna take some getting used to. But you'll probably never forget it! I thought it was a good association with the word transformation which is what happens in us when God's kingdom comes in our lives and his will is done. Kingdomation – don't forget it! I'm certain it's going to be in the dictionary in a few years! 😊

So let's just briefly walk through each section of the acronym. And just to let you know, I have a handout that we'll pass out to each of you as you leave today, so you don't need to get frantic trying to write it all down. The first section is T for thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING - Praying to thank God for what he's doing in your life and in the lives of others (*Ephesians 1:16; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-25; Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 95:2; Psalm 100:4*)

To me thanksgiving is the perfect place to start my time of focused prayer and it's very biblical. In Ephesians 5:20 we're told to always give thanks for all things. The instruction to pray without ceasing in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 is immediately followed by this statement: "in everything give thanks." When told to devote ourselves to prayer in Colossians 4:2, we're instructed to keep alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving. Giving thanks and glory to God is central to our relationship with him and it's a great way to start our prayer time.

From a practical sense it also works well to begin with thanksgiving. In my own experience, when I try to start with adoration I almost inevitably turn it into "thank you for what you've done for me personally," whereas adoration is intended to be primarily focused on just praising God for who he is, beholding him, and enjoying him, without necessarily relating it all back to me and the benefits I've personally received. So if I can begin by thanking God for what he's doing in relation to me personally and for the fruit he's been producing in me and in the lives of others, then I'm ready to move on to adoration.

ADORATION - Praying to reflect on God's character and his promises and to praise him for who he is (*Matthew 6:9; Psalms; Numbers 14:17-19; 2 Kings 19:15; Nehemiah 1:4-5; Daniel 9:3-40*)

Adoration is the section of our focused prayer time when we get to just behold and enjoy and be blown away with how awesome and holy and perfect and powerful our God really is. This is the “Da-da” section of our prayer time where we just enjoy being with our perfect Father and rejoicing in who he is and his tender care for us. We also get to reflect on and find comfort in his amazing promises to us. Don’t rush. Just enjoy being with God and knowing him more.

In adoration, I highly recommend that you choose ahead of time a passage of Scripture to meditate on. This will keep you focused and provide you with an accurate picture of who God really is, rather than just trying to imagine what he’s like in your head. You’ll find a treasure trove of amazing truths about who God is in the Psalms and in many other passages of Scripture. If you journal as you do your Bible study each day, make note of passages you read that you’d like to meditate on during your adoration times. And as we adore God and see him as he really is, we will naturally be led to humility and seeing our weakness and inadequacy compared to God. This prepares us for confession.

CONFESSION - Praying to repent of sin and receive forgiveness and to forgive others (*Matthew 6:12; Mark 11:25; Matthew 18:21-35; Acts 8:22-23*)

Confession is where we do our self-assessment. In light of who we have just seen God to be, what parts of me are out of step with who he is. This is the time to be completely honest with ourselves...to ask the Holy Spirit to show us where we’ve failed or are even still living in sin. This is where we come clean with God and let his light shine on any dark areas in our lives. And when he brings things to light, we confess them and tell him we want to change. And guess what always happens? He runs to us like a father to his prodigal son, wraps us up in his loving arms and never brings it up again. And he gets to work on rebuilding us and showing us how to keep from making the same mistake in the future. Why do we often wait so long to do this?

I want to share with you a description of this process written by Milton Vincent in his book, “A Gospel Primer for Christians.” He writes:

“When I sin, God feels no wrath in His heart against me. His heart is filled with nothing but love for me, and He longs for me to repent and confess my sins to Him, so that He might show me the gracious and forgiving love that

has been in His heart all along. God does not require my confession before He desires to forgive me. In His heart He has already forgiven me; and when I come to Him to confess my sins to Him, He runs to me (as it were) and is repeatedly embracing and kissing me even before I get the words of my confession out of my mouth!"

This, my friends, is what awaits us when we're willing to honestly acknowledge our sins and failures and turn them over to God.

The confession portion of our prayer time is also the place where we forgive others if we're continuing to hold things against them. Remember what Jesus told us in Mark 11:25-26: "***Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. [\"But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.\"]*** Don't wait for the other person to do what you think needs to be done first. Just forgive as you stand praying. And this brings us to my new word: the Kingdomation section of our focused prayer time.

KINGDOMATION - Praying for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done
(Matthew 6:10; Luke 22:42)

This is where our focus shifts from us and our failures back to God and his power. It's where we tell God that we want his will and his purposes rather than our own. This is a really important transition time between confession and the time we'll spend praying for ourselves and others. In it we remind ourselves as we prepare to make requests of God, that we need to keep his purposes in mind...that we need to remember we're asking for things in Jesus' name. This is where we tell God that in everything we're going to be asking for, we desire ***what he knows we need***, not ***what we think we want***. In other words, we're desiring his will and not our own. Don't skip this part of your focused prayer time. It's so important if we want to learn to pray according to God's will.

After kingdomation, we move into supplication.

SUPPLICATION - Praying for your own daily needs, spiritual and physical
(*Matthew 6:11; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:5-7; Philippians 3:3; book of Psalms*)

If we were to analyze how much time most of us spend doing supplication as we pray, my guess is that for many of us it would comprise about 95% of our prayer life. But the good thing about this statistic is that at least we're praying and recognizing our need for God. However, as we grow in the Lord and begin to understand the amazing gift that prayer is and how God uses prayer to share himself with us and accomplish his purposes, my hope is that we're drawn more and more into thanksgiving, adoration, confession, kingdomation and intercession, while continuing to supplicate.

Supplication is not in any way bad. In fact it's the heart of learning to walk by the Spirit. If you're not supplicating, you're trusting in your own strength and wisdom to get you through. But to experience the fullness of the sweet fellowship God offers us and witness his power working fully in the body of Christ, we should challenge ourselves to spend more time in these other aspects of prayer as well.

And this brings us to the final section of our TACKSI prayer time: intercession.

INTERCESSION - Praying for others (*1 Samuel 12:22-24; Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-21; Ephesians 6:18-20; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-25; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5; Philemon 1:4-6; Hebrews 13:18-21; James 5:13-18; 3 John 1:2*)

This is where we spend focused time praying for needs, spiritual and physical, in the lives of our loved ones and others God has brought across our path. In intercession we recognize that God works powerfully through prayer, accomplishing physical healing, freeing people from spiritual bondage and addictions, bringing spiritual growth in the midst of suffering and pain, drawing lost people to himself, and many other things.

We have many examples in Scripture of intercession and of how central it is to the accomplishing of God's will and the building of his kingdom. Samuel, the priest, prophet and judge of Israel, viewed prayer for other people as one his core

responsibilities in the calling God had given him. In 1st Samuel 12, verse 23, he said:

23 "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.

Samuel viewed it as a sin if he wasn't praying for the people God had put under his care. It sounds like something very important, doesn't it?

As we studied recently in Ephesians chapter 6, verses 18 to 20, Paul instructed us to pray with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, including him. Paul asked for prayer for himself and others many times in his letters and believed that it was through the prayers of the saints that lost people would come to salvation in Christ and God's kingdom would grow. Want some examples?

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you; 2 and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.

Hebrews 13:18-21

18 Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. 19 And I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Romans 15:30-31

30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

2 Corinthians 1:10-11

And He will yet deliver us, 11 you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.

Phil 1:18-20

Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Intercession is a means by which God accomplishes his purposes in our hearts and in the world.

Try TACKSI this week. Think of it as a really good taxi driver in a foreign country, taking you to new places you've never seen or experienced before in prayer. Just don't try to spell it with an "X" or you're going to spend a lot of time trying to remember what "X" stands for. Remember "CK."

Find a quiet spot by yourself this week with a passage of Scripture in front of you and prepare to enjoy sweet fellowship with your Father! Then eagerly watch to see what he does as you TACKSI more and more and as you continue praying without ceasing throughout your day-to-day business.

III. PRAYING BIBLICALLY

What I want to do for the last few minutes today, is quickly walk you through the priorities of prayer based on what we see people praying for in Scripture. I want to give you some practical examples and ideas for praying biblically. This material will be on the handout we give you at the end, so don't try to write it all down. We'll be going way too fast for that and I'd rather just have you think about each one as we go. What I want to share with you are specific, biblical things to pray for yourself and for others during your supplication and intercession time. These are things you can pray and know that you're praying according to God's will, because they've all been taken from prayers prayed in Scripture.

This is not an exhaustive list, however, and I'd encourage you to add other things to it as you come across them in Scripture. Share them with me too so I can add them to my list! Use them as an inspiration and guide to help you pray more biblically. This is not a list of the only things you're allowed to pray for, but rather a guide to inspire and transform the way you pray.

I've broken these prayers down into 3 main categories: 1) Daily living prayers; 2) Spiritual growth prayers; and 3) Great Commission prayers. And I've included Scriptures on the handout I'll give you to show you where I got these prayers and provide you with examples of people praying this way. I'd encourage you to spend some time in the near future meditating on each one and looking up the Scriptures. But mostly I'd just love to see you use these prayers practically as you spend time praying for yourself and others. You'll be amazed how your praying times will be enriched and what God will accomplish as you learn to pray more and more in line with his will.

So let's quickly walk through these as we close today and then you can look more closely at them on your own.

DAILY LIVING PRAYERS:

Pray to be strengthened with the power of the Holy Spirit (*Luke 11:9-13; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 3:14-16; Colossians 1:11*)

Pray to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (*Colossians 1:9*)

Pray for deliverance from temptation and evil (*Matthew 6:13; Luke 22:39-46; 2 Kings 19:19; entire book of Psalms; 2 Thessalonians 3:2-3*)

Pray to relieve anxiety and receive God's peace (*Philippians 4:5-7*)

Pray for help, endurance and deliverance in pain, suffering and trials (*Psalms 5:1-3; Ephesians 6:10-18*)

Pray that God would accomplish good through the trials he's allowing you to go through (*Romans 8:26-28*)

Pray for healing, spiritual and physical (*James 5:13-18; book of Acts*)

Pray for miracles (*James 5:17-18; the book of Acts; Mark 9:23-27; Matthew 19:26; Mark 14:36; 2 Samuel 15:31; 2 Kings 19:14-19*)

Pray for your enemies (*Matthew 5:43-45; Luke 6:27-28*)

Pray to prosper and be in good health (*3 John 1:2; 1 Timothy 2:1-2*)

Pray for secular leaders and those in authority over you (*1 Timothy 2:1-2*)

SPIRITUAL GROWTH PRAYERS:

Pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God (*Ephesians 1:17*)

Pray that the eyes of our hearts may be opened to know the hope of God's calling, how deeply He treasures us as His inheritance, and how great is the power He's made available to those of us who rely on Him (*Ephesians 1:18-19*)

Pray that the Lord would direct our hearts into the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ (*2 Thessalonians 3:5*)

Pray that we would be rooted and grounded in love and be able to understand the full extent of Christ's personal love for us (*Ephesians 3:17-19*)

Pray that our love will abound in real knowledge and all discernment (*Philippians 1:9-11*)

Pray that God would sanctify us entirely, transforming us to be like Christ (*1 Thessalonians 5:23-25*)

Pray that God would fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power (*2 Thessalonians 1:11b*)

Pray that we would understand every good thing that is in us for Christ's sake and that this knowledge would cause us to be unified as the body of Christ (*Philemon 1:6*)

Pray for spiritual gifting to edify the body and that we would use our gifts (*1 Corinthians 14:13-19; Ephesians 4:7-16*)

Pray that God would equip us in every good thing to do his will (*Hebrews 13:20-21*)

Pray that God would count us worthy of our calling (*2 Thessalonians 1:11a*)

GREAT COMMISSION PRAYERS:

Pray for God to raise up workers to fulfill the Great Commission (*Matthew 9:37-28*)

Pray for words and boldness in proclaiming the gospel (*Ephesians 6:18-20; Colossians 4:2-4*)

Pray that God would soften hearts and draw lost people to salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit (*1 Thessalonians 1:2-5a*)

Pray that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified (*2 Thessalonians 3:1; Colossians 4:3*)

We have an adventure ahead of us as we learn to pray as God designed...as we learn to pray according to God's priorities...as we learn to live and breathe conversation with God. I was talking with Andy Baxter this week and he reminded me that the way God's kingdom works is quite simple. God invites us to walk through life with him and experience his power and wisdom and fellowship as we learn to operate in a way that can be described with two simple words: "Just ask." God's kingdom comes in power within us as we turn our eyes from ourselves and look to God for everything we need. Prayer isn't a duty, my friends, but a precious privilege that ushers us into the very presence of God, and brings his power to bear on every aspect of our lives. Just ask and keep asking and watch what God does!