



## THESE THINGS I PRAY

**T**his five-week series will be an exploration of the power of prayer, using the book of Psalms as a guide. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Psalms the “Prayerbook of the Bible.” While we don’t necessarily pray for everything the Psalms pray for, we do learn from the Psalms the mode of prayer – how to come to God in prayer. Through this series we’ll explore the simple acronym for prayer – ACTS – which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Prayer changes things and every prayer has power. Our hope is through this series you’ll be better connected to the power of prayer.

## THE POWER OF PRAYER • Psalm 65 • Tim McConnell • October 23, 2016

My first ministry position was in Southern New Jersey, South Jersey, and Abigail and I bought a 1923 Sears Craftsmen kit home in Riverton, NJ. It was a fun house, lots of character and lots of opportunity to learn how to fix things—and we fixed a lot. Being an old home, one wall in our living room had only one little electric outlet on the whole wall. But it was dead. The house was old, it was originally knob and tube electric, so I figured somewhere down the line that outlet just got left behind. All the years we lived there, we couldn't put a lamp on that side of the couch. Early on we tried running extension cords around the room or under the carpet, but we just gave up. Now, we had this huge TV cabinet on the opposite wall, and on the day we moved out I noticed a light switch that had sat behind the TV cabinet all along. Huh. I flipped it on and off and no lights went on. Then I plugged a lamp into that dead outlet, and I flipped the switch. "Well, I'll be! The lamp went on!" That was a little piece of information I really could have used. Are you plugged in? Is the switch on? Are you connected? We connect to God in prayer.

This morning we start a series talking about patterns of prayer, *These Things I Pray*. Are we connected to the power of prayer? The great preacher Peter Marshall taught during the rise of the nuclear age. He said mankind has grown to harness natural laws and powers, moving from fire to steam to explosives to electricity to atomic power, but Peter Marshall preached about a power we still seemed to neglect: "It was a power that would enable believers to do the mighty works of Christ, and to experience, flowing in and through their own lives, the energy of God. Here is a power so tremendous that with it nothing is impossible; and without it, nothing we do has any eternal value or significance. It is a power so simple that a child may use it...yet we reach for that power only when our hands are clasped in prayer." (*Praying Is Dangerous Business*) Prayer connects us with God. Prayer releases the energies of God. Prayer is the fuel of the church. Prayer changes things. Prayer changes us. More than prayer pulling God into this world, we need to think of prayer pulling us into God's world. The more we pray, openly and genuinely, the more our minds get knit to God's mind, the more our hearts become knit together with God's heart, the more our wills are knit to God's will. Are we connected to the power of prayer?

We are going to look at a number of Psalms together. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Psalms "The Prayer-book of the Bible," and encouraged his students to

use the Psalms to learn how to pray. He said it's like kids learning to speak by listening to their parents. We don't know how to pray, but like a toddler listening to adults use English, we can pray the Psalms to learn to pray: "So we learn to speak to God because God has spoken and speaks to us. In the language of the Father in heaven God's children learn to speak with God. Repeating God's own words, we begin to pray to God." The Psalms sometimes pray beautifully, and sometimes they are gritty and dark and even nasty or unkind. So we learn that we are not required to make perfect prayers, but to open our true wants and needs, the honest desires of our hearts, before the Lord. And the Lord will do with them what He will. Some prayers are answered, some deferred, and for some the answer is "No way!" But without a shadow of a doubt, prayer changes things. By every prayer we are more deeply connected with God—connected to the power of prayer.

When I first came to Christ through Young Life, someone handed me a Navigator's pamphlet written by Bob Foster called "7 Minutes with God." It basically said, better to spend a little time with God every day than put off a long engagement with God until there's time (which we all know there never is time), so if you currently set your alarm to 6:30, set it back to 6:23 and spend seven minutes with God. My alarm was set at 6:23 for years. A quick prayer, a few minutes in Scripture, then there was a pattern of prayer under the acronym ACTS. It is a pattern of prayer I still use to this day to come before the Lord in daily prayer. ACTS: Adoration, recognizing just who God is; Confession, recognizing just who I am and asking forgiveness for the things I've done against God's law; Thanksgiving, lifting up gratitude for all the blessings God has poured into my life; and Supplication, asking God for the things I need or I know others need and imploring Him to bring His power. We are going to walk through each of these over the next four weeks. But with one shift: we want Thanksgiving to fall on our Thanksgiving Sunday worship, so we switched the last two. Are you connected to the power of prayer? Here's a way to pray.

Just look at Psalm 65. This is a Psalm of David, written by David. We think it may have been a Psalm for the harvest season, maybe used in the Festival of the Booths. Psalms are not theological treatises, although they present some theology. They are not poems, although the language is poetic. They are prayers, and they are songs. They are prayers meant to be sung by the people of God. Let me pause there and ask: How

important is worship? How important is communal worship to your growth as a disciple? This Psalm was not written as a private meditation, but a song for the church to sing, a communal prayer for the congregation to gather and lift up together. We cannot pursue full discipleship of Jesus alone. We need the church. To read this prayer alone in your closet is different from gathering with the people, in the appointed space, at the appointed time, setting aside all other commitments and possibilities and responsibilities and saying, "This is my priority in this hour. I give this hour away to the glory of God. I am coming to worship!" So this Psalm David wrote and gave, as you see in the heading, to the director of music, and he said gather the people, teach them the song, and let them worship. If you want to truly learn to pray, come into the house of prayer. You know, if you watch carefully you might see that we are rehearsing this same healthy pattern of prayer in every worship service. Come in and walk with the body of Christ through the dance steps of the kingdom, learn the rhythms and soon it will not feel so foreign to connect with God in the power of prayer.

Psalm 65 begins with adoration. By adoration, I mean the practice of pausing in prayer to recognize just Who it is you are addressing. Before I drop my laundry list on God, before I drop my list of demands on the divine butler, you know, it's a little bit important that I recognize just Who I'm talking to! "Praise awaits You, our God, in Zion; to You our vows will be fulfilled. You who answer prayer, to You all people will come." (Psalm 65:1-2) God deserves praise and adoration. He is worthy of being adored. Too often we adore things unworthy of true adoration, and they collapse under the pressure of our praise. God is worthy of adoration and praise. You cannot offer too much worship and adoration. You cannot love God too much, you cannot praise Jesus too much. You can get off balance with other things, loving them too much, obsessing over them, vesting them with an authority in your life they should not have. But not so with God. God can take it; God is worthy of it. "Praise awaits you, O God." "You who answer prayer," you are worthy. David calls God "You who answer prayer." God is not silent and dumb like a stone idol. God answers when we call. Before I unload my laundry list on God, it is healthy to grow in awareness of who God is and enjoy God for who He is in Himself. God is able. God is all-powerful. Verses 5-8 say, "You answer us with awesome and righteous deeds, God our Savior, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas, who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roar-

ing of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations. The whole earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy." That's who God is. That's who we are addressing in prayer.

This leads to confession very naturally: "When we were overwhelmed by sins, You forgave our transgressions." (Psalm 65:3) "Forgave" is a little light there for the translation from the Hebrew. In fact, some of your Bibles may have a note on that word, that it's a little more than just "forgive," but it says God "makes atonement," God "covers over," God provides the sacrifice necessary to pay the debt you could not pay. Just as soon as we pause and recognize who God is, just as soon as we experience the awe and power of that moment when we see just who it is we are in dialogue with—"Oh, it's You! Oh my goodness, I had no idea. You are majestic, all-powerful, almighty, holy, holy, holy..." Immediately you see your own unholiness. Immediately we hit our knees. But we can confess, we can admit, we can repent and turn and be open and honest and clear with God, because God is more ready to forgive than we are to confess. In Jesus, God provides atonement, provides a payment, God clears the balance before you have even assessed the full amount of your debt.

Adoration. Confession. Then thanksgiving. Back in verse one, the "vows" were acts of thanksgiving, "to You our vows will be fulfilled." The Psalms are filled with overflowing thanksgiving. You can get far with an attitude of gratitude. Our psalm gives thanks for the bounty of the land. The rains pour down and fill the soil with life, the fields are painted gold with grain, the harvest is so great it overflows the carts, the meadows are covered with flocks (that's wealth in the ancient world—livestock). By the hand of God, we have received blessing after blessing. List a few. Give thanks. It is healthy for your soul and it deepens your relationship with God. Plus it lends to joy. It's in the thanksgiving verses we find all this about happiness and joy. That's no accident; gratitude and joy walk hand in hand. "The grasslands of the wilderness overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing." (Psalm 65:12-13) A little time spent in gratitude can change your emotional outlook.

Finally, supplication. A supplicant is someone who respectfully pleads before a person of power or influence for a little help. We can lay our needs bare before the Lord. Tell the Lord the desire of your heart.

He may grant it, He may defer it, He may deny it and redirect your desires to higher and better things, but He will not ignore your needs. Prayer always makes a difference; it always unites us with God in deeper and more meaningful ways. This is God, "You who answer prayer." (Psalm 65:2)

Jesus said such things about prayer as to make a pastor blush. "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:22-23) "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14) I don't want to get caught saying that stuff. Am I wrong or is Jesus wrong? Are we connected to the power of prayer?

It is a great mystery why some prayers are answered and granted and others are not. You and I both could count how many leaders we have heard trying to solve that riddle. "If only you truly believed," they say. Or "it only works if you use the name properly," or "it only happens if you pray according to the will of God." As if any of these were the secret key. As if prayer were some magical incantation, and if you only got your side of the equation right it would turn out according to your desired results on the other end. Well, it just isn't like that. God will never be our divine butler. We don't know why some prayers are answered and others feel like they don't rise higher than the ceiling. Prayer is not a commercial transaction with God. But it is intimacy. It is belonging. It is trust and faith. Every prayer changes things. Every prayer has power. Paul wrote, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) You can live your life in constant prayer, continuous prayer, ever deepening your relationship with God, walking with Christ at every step, in constant companionship with the Almighty God. That's the power of prayer.

## STUDY GUIDE

### "The Power of Prayer" • Psalm 65

#### Start It

- Prayer is such a common and critical part of our lives. Why do people pray? Can you remember the most meaningful times of prayer in your life? Is there a connection for you between your private "closet" of prayer and the communal prayer life of the church?

#### Study It

- Read Psalm 65. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Psalms "the prayer book of the Bible." He wrote a small handbook with that title for his seminary students at Finkenwalde (the underground seminary training pastors for the Confessing Church movement in resistance of the Nazi overthrow of the German Christian Church). Jesus, he said, prayed the Psalms. Martin Luther prayed the Psalms. When you don't know what to pray, you can believe that "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26) But you can also open the Psalms and allow them to give voice to your prayers. You can pray Scripture back up to God and by doing that learn healthy patterns of prayer.
- When would you be inclined to read and pray Psalm 65? What occasions of life would fit this Psalm?
- Psalm 65:1-2. Why is "praise due" to God? Psalm 65:3. What does the Lord do with our transgressions? Psalm 65:4. What promises are made to those the Lord draws near?
- The Amplified Version takes verse 8 to say: "So that those who dwell in earth's farthest parts are afraid of [nature's] signs of Your presence. You make the places where morning and evening have birth to shout for joy." Why are sunrises and sunsets so beautiful? Why do you think God wants to create beauty across the globe daily? At any given moment some part of our earth is experiencing that glow.
- Which verse in Psalm 65 strikes you the most? What emotions does it elicit? Does that inform or affect your attitude toward prayer in any way?

#### Pray It

*As the disciples asked, O Lord, so do we ask—Lord, teach us to pray. In Jesus name, Amen.*

#### Live It

Try a slow and careful reading of the Psalm. Now try praying the Psalm through, adding your own thoughts and requests, and allowing silence in between verses.