

Resolved to Pray (part 2)

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[0 : 00] We're studying resolutions, and so far we've noticed four resolutions. of the godly in the book of Psalms. I will obey, I will trust, I will testify, and I will pray.

! What various hindrances we meet in coming to the mercy seat.

And it's those various hindrances that are the reasons why we need to resolve to pray. So why do we need to resolve to pray?

Well, first of all, we have these hindrances, our enemy, the flesh, that when we would pray, we find a reluctance to pray.

And sometimes that reluctance is nothing more than that flesh that remains in us. Thomas Shepard was the president, the first president of Harvard, an institution that was begun to train men for the ministry.

[1 : 14] And he said, there are days when I would rather die than pray. He was just being honest that he had the flesh within him that would drag its heels when he would set himself to do something good like pray.

And so if he was to pray on those days, he must take hold of himself by the scruff of his neck and drag himself to pray, to resolve to pray. I will pray whether I feel like it or not.

And then we saw that we have an enemy, Satan, and we just sang of it, that he trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees because a Christian before the throne of grace can call down power that far exceeds his.

And so he will do all he can to keep God's people from prayer. Then there's the world and its distractions, its allurements that would pull us toward other things rather than to the more important things.

So these are all enemies, and these are the battles that we're called to fight. You read the Old Testament battles, much of the Old Testament and the Kings and the Psalms and the Chronicles.

[2 : 26] It's about battles, isn't it? What do you do with those passages? One thing you need to do is to say, well, what are my battles? And it's just here. We need to battle to pray, don't we?

To do the hard right, and it requires some resolve rather than caving in to resolve. I will call on the Lord, for he will answer me.

So prayer is spiritual work. It's heart work, and it's also hard work. And the more difficult anything is, the more resolve is needed to persevere through it.

You sign up for some exercise course, and maybe at the beginning pages there's a form for you to put down your goals and to resolve that I will do this regardless of how I feel, and you sign the form. There needs to be, why? Because there's going to be days you don't feel like working out. Well, it's the same with prayer, and unless we have resolved, I will call on the Lord.

[3 : 27] There will be many days that we don't pray, and so miss the blessings that come through prayer. You have not because you ask not.

Well, those are the three great enemies to prayer, but we're going to look. You listed many others, and we're going to look at a half a dozen of those this morning. First, number four today, is the difficulty of putting our thoughts into words.

And that can make us grow weary in prayer. The difficulty of clothing our ideas with words, clothing the feelings in our hearts with words.

And that's not only true when we're praying in public with others, but it can be true when we're praying ourselves in private, that we have this difficulty of knowing what words to use. And again, any difficulty that we meet with can push us away from prayer.

Power says, Now as God does not look at a man's clothes, but at the man himself, so he looks not at his words, but at the ideas and feelings of a man's prayer.

[4 : 37] Be the words never so poor, he will understand them. He will never misunderstand them. His understanding no one can fathom. And he can understand your bumbings in prayer.

Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart. And that's never more true than when we are praying. And that should be for your encouragement. He's not just listening. He's also looking.

And he sees the heart behind the prayer. Now the Bible acknowledges this problem. Turn over to Romans chapter 8. And again, it just, this, this, whoever wrote the Bible knows us.

That's what I see. Every time I, I read the Bible, I feel I come away. This author knows me. And so we see it here. That the God who authored every word of scripture knows our struggles in prayer at this very point of knowing how to clothe our thoughts with words.

And notice his encouragement to us in verse 26 of Romans 8. In the same way, the spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for.

[5 : 52] But the spirit himself intercedes for us. With groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the spirit because the spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's word.

God knows that we don't know what to pray for as we ought. That we don't know what words to use to express our hearts. But the Holy Spirit breathe groans that words cannot express are understood by God.

He understands the groans of your heart that are too deep or even too confused to put into words. Commentator Denny speaks of the sighs of the Christian that baffle words.

He understands the sighs. You look at the day, you look at the, and all you can do is sigh. And he understands a sigh of a baffled saint.

So the Holy Spirit, our helper at prayer for this very thing. Psalm 79, 11. May the groans of the prisoners come before you.

[7 : 06] The groans rising up to heaven. And God understands them. You remember the account of Elkanah's two wives.

Peninnah had children. Hannah had none. And because the Lord had clothed Hannah's womb, her rival wife, Peninnah, kept provoking her in order to irritate her.

There was nothing accidental about it. It was intentional. And this went on year after year. And one year at the temple in Shiloh, Hannah was so distressed by Hannah's provocation that she just wept and wept and would not eat.

Well, her husband didn't understand her tears. Don't I mean more to you than ten sons? Really sensitive guy.

Eli, the priest, didn't understand her. He saw her praying in the temple in bitterness of soul and weeping. And he observed her mouth. She was praying in her heart and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard.

[8 : 12] And Eli thought she was drunk and chided her. How long will you keep on getting drunk? Now that just shows you how low the piety in Israel was in that day. Women were showing up in the temple drunk.

And Eli thinks that Hannah's no different. Get rid of your wine. Not so, my Lord. I'm a woman who is deeply troubled. I've not been drinking wine or beer.

I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Out of my great anguish and grief, I was just taking the picture of my heart and dumping it before the Lord.

Her lips were moving, but no words were coming forth. And the Lord has no problems understanding her groanings and longings of her heart. And she soon had a son that she had asked for.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asked, what is prayer? And the answer begins, prayer is the offering up of our desires to God. So it's not just the words.

[9 : 15] It's the offering up of our desires to God. And every desire, even those that are unclothed with words, are a language that God understands when they're brought before him.

Psalm 10, 17. You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted. Isn't that something? Not you hear the words. You hear the desire of the afflicted as the desire is lifted up to him.

Psalm 62, 8. Prayer is a pouring out of your heart to the Lord. So Bunyan says, better to let your heart be without words than your words be without heart when it comes to prayer.

Sometimes there's more heart. Sometimes there's more heart in just two words than there is in 10 minutes of words in prayer. Like Peter's, save me.

Save me. Not many words. But oh, the heart as he was sinking and look to the Lord to grab him and rescue him from the deep. And that's why we need to pray to pray.

[10:23] To pray that we might pray. God, give me by your spirit. Create in me those desires. That I not just speak words to you, but that I come with true heart desire.

Do you know I don't have any of those? Of myself. They are the product of the Holy Spirit working in us. The desires that he has for us.

And that's why he can freely promise to give us the desires of our hearts. And so we pray to pray.

Give me deeper desires, Lord. I love you, but I know I don't love you as I ought to love you.

I want to want you more. He hears the desire of the afflicted. So don't let the difficulty of putting your thoughts into words keep you from prayer. Resolve. Well, I will pray, even if it's nothing more than coming and groaning before the Lord.

I will pray. And he will understand the desire of the afflicted. A fifth difficulty in prayer is our own remaining unbelief.

[11:29] And someone said it in the class last week. That unbelief can either be whether God is able or whether God is willing. Power says, though we have faith enough for eternal life, And this is incredible, isn't it?

That every believer has faith enough that the blood of Jesus will qualify us for eternal life. Though we have faith enough for eternal life, There exists also remnants enough of unbelief.

And this unbelief many a time keeps the believer from the throne of grace. We need something that God can give us, but we doubt that he will. And so we don't ask. Or if we do ask, this remnant of unbelief takes the life out of many of our prayers, So that though we ask, it's hardly with faith.

In fact, it's often as if we never asked if you would watch our expectation after prayer. So we may need to pray, confessing as we do with that father in the gospels, Lord, I do believe.

Help my unbelief. There's still remnants of this unbelief. So help me in prayer with my unbelief. We confess it to the Lord who knows all about it, but still wants to hear it from us.

[12:46] But what we mustn't do in these times is just give in to unbelief. To let it win the battle and to keep us from praying. We need to meet our unbelief with a brave and a determined, I will.

I will call on the Lord. Even with my weak faith. Remember, it's not great faith to which Jesus promised that mountains would move. But even faith as a mustard seed.

So I will bring my mustard seed faith to the one who can move mountains and call on him to help.

And it's often, as our author says, that in such weak prayers that we receive faith.

It's often before the throne of grace. And as our minds are set upon him who sits upon the throne and his large heart toward us, and we begin to ask with our little faith that faith grows.

And we see his heart for us. And we're emboldened to ask with greater faith. That doesn't happen when I stay away from prayer. And if I just wait till my faith's great, it probably will never get greater.

[13:53] But if I come and take my little seed and come, and it's as I pray that greater faith is given. So when unbelief says to you, no use praying about that.

John, no use mentioning that at the throne of grace. Not going to happen. Double down and say, I will call on the name of the Lord. And he will answer me.

And each victory will help you some other to win. Each victory over unbelief will help you over some other battle with unbelief.

So don't let unbelief keep you from prayer. Rather, let it draw you to God crying for greater faith and using the mustard seed that you do have to call on the Lord.

So two hindrances. I'm just going to pause. Any questions or comments that you would like to have? The hindrance of knowing the words to use in prayer? The hindrance of our weak faith?

[14:51] Our unbelief? Any words? Mark? I was thinking of that old spiritual, every time I feel the spirit moving in my heart, I'm going to pray. What were you thinking about it?

How it tied in with those groanings. Good. So the author that felt his heart drawn to prayer, and yes, I don't know how many spiritual guides, guides in the spiritual life, reemphasize whenever you feel the spirit moving in your heart to pray.

Give yourself to it. Just put up the sail and give yourself to the wind of the spirit. Set aside whatever you're doing. Stop. Call a time out. If you feel like praying, pray.

What a blessedness. But if that's the only time you pray, you've missed a whole lot of times you ought to pray. There are times when you don't feel the spirit moving in your heart. And that's when you need to say, I will pray.

And perhaps in prayer, you will find the precious breeze of the spirit. So thank you, Mark. Wonderful truth and reality to the Christian. And I don't mean to say that prayer, we're talking about the difficulties of prayer, but I trust we know something as well of the ease of prayer.

[16:06] prayer. It's something of an antinomy that there's nothing more natural to the Christian than to pray. It's his natural breath. But just as it's natural for you to, you're doing it, you're breathing.

So to the Christian, it's a natural thing to pray because God has made you a new creature and put a new heart in you with desires for God, with a heart that knows he's your father.

And so the most natural thing to do is pray. So there's this tug of war, and I don't want to give the impression that there aren't times when you feel like praying. And perhaps that's most of the time. Praise God for it. But there's others of us who find that there's also some difficulties in prayer. And that's why we need the resolve to pray. And David evidently found it. Will, did you have something? Yes. I'm not going to answer anymore. Mm-hmm. Because we're... Good. Sometimes you feel too small.

[17:03] And we'll see more of that in a moment. But there's other times you feel too sinful. And that's why we have Jesus. And his blood has opened up this new and living way into the most holy place.

And so we rest our prayer on Jesus' blood. In Jesus' name, I come and I pray because of Jesus. So we have every encouragement to overcome these feelings of unbelief and inadequacy because of our sin, because of our smallness.

Good. Next, hindrance to prayer. Number six. Remaining self-trust and the tendency back toward independence. What was the first sin?

Well, it was just Adam and Eve striking out at an attempt of independence. I will do it my way. And that's something that a believer finds in his own hearts.

The remnants of that, of that independence, that self-trust. I can handle this. I can do this. I'll do it myself. And it's seen in the way we so easily slip into leaning on our own understanding and our ingenuity to solve the problem.

[18:18] I can figure this out. Or I'm strong enough and I'll get through the day. Our author says, So you have a whole church full of them in Revelation 3.17 and they think, I am rich and increased and have need of nothing.

Oh, really? Jesus says. You don't know the half of it. You're naked. You're bankrupt. You're blind. You have need of everything. And yet the believer can have this sense of, I'm okay.

Why would I need to pray? Well, there's something of that left, a battle. And just as the heart's declaration of need and dependence on God, so prayerlessness is something of an unlying barometer about our heart's trust as to where it is in self rather than in God.

When we're prayerless, it's the barometer saying the weight is on John. He's putting his trust on John. No, prayer is putting our weight on God. And so prayerlessness or less of prayer means often that there's this self-trust.

We forget too easily how much we need God for all things and can quickly and prayerlessly dive into the business of the day and figure it out ourselves.

[19:51] That's the way of the old man. We used to live that way. And it can be something that we're almost unconscious of that we're telling us, I've done this many times before, so I don't need to pray about this thing.

Maybe it's things at your work. Maybe it's your housework. You're bringing up children. Things you've done hundreds of times before. And I can do this, so I don't need to pray about that.

There was a man once who had such thoughts. His name was Joshua. And he and the leaders of Israel thought, we've got this one, Lord. When coming into the promised land, they were to destroy all the people in the promised land.

And so a contingency of Gibeonites came. And they said, we're from a far country. Look at our moldy bread. It was fresh. We had it right out of the oven when we left home. Look at our sandals, how worn and holy our clothes.

You see, we've come from a distant country. And Joshua and the leaders sampled their provisions and did not inquire of the Lord.

[20 : 58] And so they were hoodwinked. And they made a covenant with them not to destroy them. And then they found out they were their next-door neighbors. They were those that they were to destroy utterly under God's ban, under his curse.

Again, don't need God for this. Anybody can see the bread is moldy and the shoes are worn out. Miserably deceived.

And Satan's always there to whisper the same. Why carry all those? And I want to give that to you as our author did. Why carry all those trumpery little things to God?

I don't know if our president realizes it, but trumpery means worthless, rubbishy. All right? I looked it up. What's this English, this old English word here?

Why carry all those worthless, rubbishy little things to God? This is kind of like what Will was saying. We've got these little things. Your God's got bigger things to deal with.

[21 : 58] Why carry your little worthless concerns to God? And that can be a great hindrance to us. God meant you to help yourself, so why don't you?

And our author says he adds a great deal more of the same stamp, the same kind of thing to us. Of course, he never tells us that God is our Father and is interested in the most minute affairs of our life.

He doesn't tell us that our Father calls us to be anxious about nothing but to pray about everything. And he doesn't tell us.

Or neither does he tell us that God says, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. So Satan, this is one of his tricks to get us to live without seeking or acknowledging God by prayer.

I've got this one on my own. And we must meet that thought with, no, I need God for everything. I need him for my next breath.

[23 : 03] I need him for those things that I do every day. God, come and help me today. The resolve. Though I've done this five times a week for 30 or 40 years, I will still ask God to bless the work of my hands.

For without him, I can do nothing. Seventh, the resolve to pray is also needed because, as someone shared last week, of our lack of childlike closeness to God as our Father.

Power puts it in this way, our remaining slowness to come alone and immediately to God in times of prayer. We're very prone to run to someone else first for sympathy or help rather than to first and immediately run to God himself in prayer.

We sang it, didn't we? We're too prone to complain and fill our fellow creature's ear with a sad, can you believe it? You know what's happened now? And we do that first.

But we're half the breath that we vainly spend just complaining to each other. Sent in heaven, in supplication sent, our cheerful song would oftener be, Hear what the Lord has done for me.

[24 : 15] Now, our author and cowper in writing this hymn is not saying that sharing our burdens with others is sinful or wrong. Not at all. The sympathy and help of a spouse, of a friend, of a brother and sister in Christ is one of God's gifts to us.

It's one of the ways he brings help and encouragement to us. But going to them first only shows that we've not yet got to know our Lord by experience as our closest and best friend in life.

That would allow us at once, in power's words, at once to go to him and to tell him everything, either about what we want to do or what we have to bear.

So the better we get to know him, the sooner we come to him with our needs, our burdens, our neediness. So Hezekiah receives a threatening letter from Sennacherib.

And what does he do? Well, he tucks the letter under his arm and he goes to the temple. And he gets to the temple and he spreads the letter out before the Lord and prays.

[25 : 33] Just a wonderful picture, isn't it? How it ought to be with us. You get troublesome news? Doubt if many of you get it in the letters anymore. Texts or emails.

And you just, okay. Read, Lord, you see. You see what's written here. You see my fears.

You see my troubles. Lord, hear an answer. A very reality in prayer. To really believe that God is listening and He's looking.

And so He just points to the letter. And takes it first to Him. Power says, Let me recommend to you, dear reader, to go in with your letters before the Lord, to spread them as literally before Him as you

would before a friend.

To point with your finger as you pray to the very passages which trouble you most in that letter. And in such an exercise as this, there will be a reality which will speak even to your own soul.

[26 : 42] The matter will be between God and you. And you may be sure you will have a realization that it is so. That there is a real transaction going on here between me and the living God.

Reverend Robert Bruce was on his deathbed and he sensed that his time was coming to a close on this earth. His eyesight failed him. And he asked his family to bring his Bible and to open it to Romans chapter 8 and to find where it was written in verses 38 and 39 that I am persuaded that neither death nor life shall be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus my Lord and to put my finger on those words.

A dying man's request. It went and got his Bible. They opened it up and put his finger. Is it on verses 38 and 39?

Yes, Father. And he died with his finger on a promise. There is something about the reality of it all, isn't it? That says, God, you wrote this and all my hopes, all my trust as I go out of this life and come to meet you in judgment it is all upon this unfailling love of God in Jesus Christ for me.

There is a reality about it. And so our author would encourage us. Another thing that we can do to bring the reality of it home is to pray aloud to God.

[28 : 14] When you complain to your brother and sister you talk out loud. Talk out loud to God about your problems and it brings, if to no one else, to yourself more of the reality that I am talking to someone.

There is someone to talk to and I am doing it now. And to do this in the common things of life. He goes on to say, if you have a letter to write, point to the empty page and ask God to give you words to fill it.

You've got a sermon to prepare. Point to the text, the empty page and ask for words for the sermon. And once finished, hold those notes up and ask God to bless your preparations and your teaching and your preaching.

If you have medicine to take, as you hold the bottle, to ask the Lord to bless it. As you look at the food in front of you and bow your head to thank Him for that food that you now see. He's wanting us to get over this idea of unreality in prayer and to realize that there is one who hears and that we would go to Him in the common things.

He finishes, so might we bring the might of heaven into the little things of daily life and live in the enjoyment of a privilege which is surely ours, ours in Christ.

[29 : 27] To come as friend with friend and to come alone and at once to Him as such. Resolve is needed eighthly because of our own felt imperfections in prayer.

We're generally reluctant to do things that we don't do well. We gravitate to doing the things that we do well. And there's nothing wrong with that in and of itself, but there are things we don't do so well that need to get done.

And that could be true of prayer. And we're just all too aware of our imperfections in prayer and how short we come to the standard, our coldness of heart, our wondering thoughts, our inability to find right words, our unbelief, how pitiful our prayers are.

And Satan might say amen to all that. In fact, he might be the author of some of those thoughts. So you might be tempted to wait until you're in a better frame of heart to pray. Power says, so with his mind turned in upon himself, he gets weaker instead of stronger, which is precisely the result that Satan wishes to bring about.

It's in praying that we will be strengthened and we'll have our hearts warmed and filled with faith, not waiting, not by waiting, but by praying. And he says, so dear reader, be encouraged to come to God just as you are.

[30 : 47] I love the song, Just As I Am, without one plea. That's not just for unregenerate people. It's for Christians. That's what he's reminding us. Be encouraged to come to God just as you are with all your imperfections, all your shortcomings.

Nothing can atone for the presence of these in your past prayers save the blood of the blessed Jesus who's already atoned for them. If so, be that your prayers were offered through him.

Let us remember that he, the perfect one, will do away with our imperfections. And if the heart be right with God, Jesus will take care that the prayer is right with him also. Our past imperfections, instead of making us backward to pray, should rather spur us forward in order that such

imperfections should be overcome.

Let us put ourselves under restraint and bringing with us Jesus, the one through whom all prayer is heard, determine in the power of the Spirit and say, I will pray.

I will pray. So, there's the hindrances. there's the reasons that we might not pray as much as we ought or that when we pray, we don't pray as we ought.

[31 : 56] And you can see how rather than just giving in to the tide of them, we rather need to turn right into the face of them with resolution. I will call on the name of the Lord.

I wonder if you can see why we desperately need to resolve with the psalmist, I will pray with regard to the first three of our resolutions.

I will obey. What is there about that resolution that needs to be followed up with the resolution I will pray? Do you have the will and the power to obey all of God's commands?

No. So, so he's saying, boy, if we're going to resolve, I will obey. I will not delay to keep your commands. Then we surely ought to follow up with the resolution. I will pray because apart from him, I can do nothing.

I don't have the will or the power to obey, but he works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. Lord, give me help then to keep the resolution to obey.

[33 : 03] What about the resolution to trust? What is there about trust that requires prayer? Pardon?

Yeah, you need faith and we just talked about our miserable unbelief and so we've got to bring it to the Lord. I believe, Lord, but help my unbelief and you can see how this, this resolution spreads its effect on the others.

I will testify. What is there about testifying? Whether to your brothers and sisters in church or to the world out there that would require, oh, I need you, Lord. Well, there's many things, the fear of man and all the rest.

So we see this resolve to prayer spreads its canopy over everything in our lives and especially as we're thinking about resolutions over these first three resolves.

How can they survive without prayer? How can they ever be fruitful without prayer? They'll just wither and die like the dew is dried up by noon sun. Let me close with Psalm 116, 1 and 2.

[34 : 18] It was one of the texts from which this study on the resolution to pray came from. I love the Lord for he heard my voice. He heard my cry for mercy and because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.

His resolve is I will call on him as long as I live. And what brought him to this fresh resolve? Well, it was his past answers.

I love the Lord for he heard my voice. He heard my cry for mercy and because he did turn his ear to me yesterday and this morning and last week.

I'm going to call on him all the days of my life. Isn't that a beautiful encouragement to this resolve? To look back over our lives and to see the times we called and he heard and he answered us.

What does that do for you? What does that do for your resolve? We see what it did for David. It made him resolve that this will not be something I do just once and now and again but I'm going to call on you as long as I live.

[35 : 29] Indeed, as long as I have breath. I'll be coming. I'm going to knock at this door forever. I'm going to call on this name forever.

I'm going to ask at this throne forever. I wonder if God's answers to your prayer are deepening your resolve to pray.

That's the lesson here as we conclude. If we would want more resolution, let's think about what our God has done for us. You can go right back to the time when you first saw your sin and need of the Savior and you called on the name of the Lord and he saved you.

Oh, because he heard and answered, I'm going to call on him as long as I live. And then you can think back at different periods of your life when you called on the Lord and here you are still in the way today.

He's heard you. He's kept you. He's preserved you. He's upheld you with his mighty right hand. I'm going to call on you every day. A lifetime devotee to prayer.

[36 : 37] A lifetime beggar at this door of heaven. You know, if men answer us and help us in our time of need it might not be an honor or a pleasure to them to say, well, since you helped me I'm going to always come asking you first.

They would say, no, no. I don't have the resources for that. But not our Lord. He's honored to have those lifetime beggars at his door. Because what does it show off?

It shows off his richness, his fullness. Jesus' love is richer, deeper, fuller. and out of his love he pours out his blessing, grace upon grace from that fullness in him.

And it shows off his fullness and his heart toward his people. So Jesus is not saying, oh no, I don't want you coming back too much. No, he thrives on that if we might say so.

His heart delights in mercy. And so, I will call on you, Lord, because you heard and turned your ear toward me. Any comments, testimonies before we close in prayer?

[37 : 44] Questions about these things that would hinder our prayer? Why we need resolve in prayer? Let's pray. Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed thy hand has provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me. Take your words, take your past hearing and answering of our prayers, and by your spirit, stir up in our hearts true desires and true resolve to pray.

And may it all redound to your praise and honor and to our strengthening of faith and hope and love and every Christian virtue that is in Jesus.

We ask in his powerful name. Amen. Well, we're dismissed. A different resolve next week, Lord willing.