

## Introduction

The Bible says, “Pray continuously”. We are commanded to pray. No one here tonight is likely surprised by that command or even reminded by it. We all know that the Bible is filled with illustrations and examples and commands related to prayer. We’ve dedicated many months of Sunday evenings to explore and become stimulated by the New Testament prayers. These have been both instructional and motivational. Tonight I want to add a simple thought to this series.

### Why Pray?

Does God need prompts from us to keep him on track? You know, He is running the entire universe. If there was anyone who needed the skill of multi-task concentration it would be God. And so, when I say, “Dear Lord, Lisa and the kids are at home without me because I’m away at a conference. Please watch over them”. Am I functioning as an alarm on a PDA helping him to stay focused and follow up on details? Would He forget the mundane because He focused on the big picture of the Universe and history?

### Why Pray?

Are we counseling him to foster wise decision making from Him? When we plea with him for protection from sickness saying, “Lord, I have much to do this week. I can ill-afford to be down with the flu. Please preserve me in the midst of all this sickness going on”. Perhaps God simply needs more information in order to make a well informed decision for our lives.

### Why Pray?

There is a Psalm that addresses that very question. Psalm 138 makes plain the purpose of prayer. Please turn in your Bibles to Ps.138 as we listen to this message called “To tell of Your Name”.

## PURPOSE OF PRAYER: TO GLORIFY GOD

As you make your way to the passage on which we will focus tonight, a word about why this message for this night. We heard his morning about an upcoming all-church outreach event. Our earnest desire is to see God glorified through the big screen showing of C.S. Lewis’ work “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe” and the ongoing life of Clearcreek Chapel. We’ve asked you to do two things for this event. We asked us to pray for and participate in this outreach opportunity. I know many of you will do this. Tonight, I simply desire to preach this Word in your hearing in order to see our faith grow strong and express itself in praying and participating in ministry.

The aim of tonight is to glorify God...

- By reminding ourselves of the purpose of prayer
- By seeing the vital connection between personal prayer and public praise
- By heightening our expectation of God
- By wholeheartedly praying for and participating in the all-church outreach event.

And so, to this end hear the reading of Ps.138 [read]

What I plan to do tonight is first outline the Psalm. We will take a quick glance at the structure and the movement of these eight verses. Following this we will do a mini meditation on the first three verses. And we set out to do this so that the aim of tonight's message might be accomplished. So let's get started.

### **A Glance at Psalm 138**

This Psalm is what is commonly called a Declarative Praise. Its genre has a pattern which begins with a declaration. Here, in 138 we come across David's declaration. "I will sing". He vows or promises to praise the Lord. This promise is found in vv.1-3. From there, we move into the second stanza or movement of this Psalm; vv.4-6. David shifts from talking about how he will sing to the Lord to how they will sing to the Lord. This movement is more than a mere forecast or wish. David is prophesying of the Day in which all the kings of the earth will praise the Lord. This is a day where King Jesus will have his due praise. This is the future Day in which there is a world-wide celebration of the majesty of the Messiah; Christ Jesus the Lord. David is thrilled with this prospect. And so, he takes that thought and comes back to where he is currently. The final stanza (vv.7-8) talks about his present circumstance. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble". David ponders the necessity of a prayer-dependant walk with the Lord. David knows that praise, if it is to be authentic, will be heard from God's people even in the midst of personal pain.

### **A Gaze at Psalm 138:1-3**

With that as a glimpse of the context for the text for tonight, allow now your eyes to rest upon vv.1-3. It is here that we see clearly the purpose for prayer.

In vv.1-3, we notice a promise and then we see a follow-up reason or ground for that promise. In vv.1-2 we come to the promise itself.

### **A Promise to Speak of Your Name (vv.1-2a)**

The reason for stating it this way is found in the meaning of a Hebrew word. Some translations like the KJV turn the Hebrew word "yadah" into the English word "praise". The word seems to carry a slightly different nuance than simply "praise". And so, many of the newer translations like the NASB or ESV render the word by "to give thanks". In the Old Testament culture, according to Claus Westermann the way the people of God would give thanks to God is "to acknowledge Him publicly. This idea of giving praise to God by acknowledging Him publicly is not unlike what took place the other day with our veterinarian. [tell of Zoe's trip to the Vet and their quality work and how we thanked them; "I will tell of your name"]. The meaning of this idea I trust is clear. David is so moved by something that he vows to praise the Lord. He will praise the Lord specifically by speaking publicly of God's Name. This simply means that David will gladly and freely tell of his excellence in front of people. This is one of the ways the OT saints would give thanks to the Lord.

So we see in vv.1-2 that David promises to speak of his Name. As we read on, we come across how and where he will carry out his promise.

### **“with all my heart”**

The how is found in the words “with all my heart”. David has been stirred up by something that he vows to speak publicly of God’s excellence with everything that is in him. In Ps.103:1 David says, “Bless the Lord, O my soul. And all that is within me bless his holy name.” Unabashedly, without any shame, with no thought of how others will think of him, David fervently, exuberantly, eagerly, passionately; with all his heart will speak of the supremacy of his great and glorious and good God.

Not only do we see how David tells of the Lord publicly but notice where he will do this.

### **“Before the gods”**

In David’s day (similar to ours), polytheism and idolatry were widespread. The Canaanite gods were everywhere he went. In fact, thinking on what the book of Ezekiel discloses, idolatry was a snare and ruin of the Israelites in David’s day. What David is saying here is that he will tell of the Lord’s excellence out in the public where pagans live. In enemy territory, David will acknowledge the Lord. He will praise his attributes. He will speak good and accurate and wonderful things about the Lord. This effectively is a frontal attack God’s people are to participate in. David is bold and clear as he makes his promise to witness of the mighty and majestic Lord God. He is roused by something utterly stimulating that with His whole heart, David will tell of the matchlessness of God behind enemy lines. This idea is simply another way of talking about worship and evangelism.

### **“toward your holy temple”**

There is another locality in which David promises to tell of the glory of God. “Toward your holy temple”. Much has been written on this phrase. Some will say that David surely did not write this psalm for he was not around when the temple was built. Without going into lengthy discussion here, I simply want to say that the place in which the ark rested was a “temple” of the Lord. David is not describing a Solomon-like edifice. He simply says that where the people of God were to worship the Lord, he would be bowing and telling of His wonderful character. This place is the place we see in Ps.149:1 “Sing to the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of the godly ones”.

What seems to be suggested here in verse 2 is the place of the congregation. The holy temple is the place at which the godly ones would congregate. David is telling of the Lord’s wonderful character in front of the congregation. He is promising to testify of the peerless perfections of the majesty and mercy of the Lord.

The bridge to us is clear is it not? The Temple; God’s people in Christ Jesus expressing His glory when gathered together can be clearly witnessed on Sunday and Wednesday. Sunday evening, for example, is particularly an exceptional time in which we with all our heart can and should tell of his name. When Ray leads us in spontaneous testimonies there ought to be much participation in this. In doing so, others will resonate with similar affections. Thus worship happens. Our faith is strengthened and our God is exalted.

What we’ve seen thus far is what David promised the Lord. He said that he will speak of his character and nature with all his heart in front of people; both the godless as well as the godly.

What I want us to do the rest of our time together is explore why he promised this. How was he able to speak with clarity and conviction in front of people about the goodness and glory of God? What was the reason for his promise to speak of His Name?

### The Reason for the Promise (vv.2b-3)

Up till now, David is exuberant in language and purpose. He is stimulated to be bold in front of people; both unbelievers as well as believers. My question for us tonight is how did he get that way? What factors led up to his whole-hearted quest to lift the name of God high in front of people?

In vv.2b-3 we make the discovery. Up to this point, we've been held in suspension. We do not know why he made such a bold and lively promise. We now come across the answer to our initial question. What is the purpose of prayer?

### For Your lovingkindness and faithfulness

To find the ground or reason for promises in the Scriptures one needs to look for the word "for" or "because". And this is exactly what we find. The first "for" we come across that gives us a hint at why he is boldly telling of God's character in front of people is found in the phrase "for your lovingkindness and faithfulness". David is stunned by the Lord's constant love and fidelity over his life. David knows he does not deserve God's "hessed" (Hebrew word for the N.T. concept of grace): His lovingkindness. David was a sinner meriting God's just wrath. David was like you who earned nothing but the gavel coming down declaring him guilty. The death sentence of eternal hell hung over his head (cf. Ps.51) And what did he get? The very opposite; The Lord's lovingkindness and faithfulness.

As a result of God's love, David vowed to boldly acknowledge His Name in the presence of people; both the ungodly and the godly.

### Since teaching me of Your Name in a manner that overwhelms me

The second "for" we come to introduces us to the reason for David's stunning realization of the Lord's lovingkindness and faithfulness. "I will give thanks to Your Name *for* your loving kindness and faithfulness *for* you have exalted above all things your name and your word". This phrase "for you have exalted above all things your name and your word" has perplexed many. The ESV translators along with others have attempted to disentangle the Hebrew by making His word and name parallel. And in doing so, they attempt to solve the problem of sounding like David is praising God for something that ranks above God's fame. The problem with this is that the Hebrew (so I'm told by Hebrew scholars) does not read like that. It reads "for you have exalted your word above all your name". The ESV captures the literal rendering of the phrase in its footnote.

Instead of attempting to alter the order of the Hebrew phrase, the solution is to read verse 3 alongside v.2b. In verse three we notice that David's prayer was answered by the Lord. The Lord's word and the Lord's answer is to be understood as parallel thought. This means that verse two is talking about answer to prayer (i.e. His word came to him / His answer came to him = word and answer are pointing to the same thing).

What is happening here attracts my heart. David knew the doctrine of the Lord's lovingkindness and faithfulness. He had read about it in the O.T. scrolls available in his day. He had heard the

oral tradition of Yahweh and His faithfulness to his covenant. But knowing the doctrine and knowing the experience of the doctrine can be to different things.

In the midst of trouble David cries out to the Lord based on what He knows of God. The Lord answer Him in such a way that David was strengthened in his soul. Now he knows the Lord's name (reputation, character, etc.) in a more personal and perceptive way. In effect, David says that he knew the Lord's name as witnessed in his lovingkindness and truth. But now he really knows His name. Thus he could say, "You have exalted your word above all your name". Due to your answer to my prayer I now know in a richer and deeper way what I knew.

### Through answering my prayers

We know we are on the right track in this interpretation by noticing the confirmation of verse three. David will tell of the Lord's name in public with boldness because he now knows of his lovingkindness and faithfulness in a fresh way through an answer to his prayer.

What does this look like in your life? In the last week, this is what it looked like in my life last week (The Point of the illustrations: I WAS LOVED BY GOD ANEW. AND I LOVED HIM IN RETURN).

- ❖ Visiting Betty in the hospital before she died. Overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy I asked the Mannings to pray for me.
- ❖ Wednesday ministry of blessing the Lord with my words and turned around and cursed a man with my words.
- ❖ Friday on the plane with "Kevin" whose self-righteousness blinded his eyes to the beauty of being saved by grace.
- ❖ Saturday morning after working on this message and how the doctrines of God were merely on paper.

I could open this time up with testimonies of the truth we see in Ps.138. Due to time I cannot. But allow this text to move you toward Him in prayer that His grace and truth will be fresh and experiential to you. The results then will be something we see in this Psalm.

### Conclusion

Its time to wrap this up. Are we able now to see the purpose of prayer? Is it that God needs reminders? Or maybe it is that God needs more information to run the universe well. Or perhaps the purpose of prayer is seen in the fact that God needs our counsel?

No. These man-centered, God-belittling answers are not the purpose of prayer. Psalm 138 made plain that:

- Private prayer gives rise to public praise since through answering us God teaches us of His Name in a manner that overwhelms us
- Public praise glorifies God
- Therefore, God glorifies His Name in answering our prayers.

And so let us...

- Increase our expectations of God (cf. Eph.3:20-21)
- Increase our prayers to Him (cf. Lk.18:1ff)
- Increase in experiencing His glory in ever-fresh ways (cf. Lam.3:23)
- Increase in telling of His Name publicly
  - Enemy territory = evangelism
  - Chapel = edification