

**Motivations to Pray—Hebrews 4:14-16—1/7/2018**  
**Copyright by Mark Vaughan 1/2018**

This morning I want to motivate you in your prayer life as we are encouraging you to spend extra time in prayer alone this week.

Then we urge men of all ages to gather on Saturday morning for a prayer retreat & ladies to gather a week from today on Sunday evening.

So I want to join our Gospel remembrance in communion this morning with some fire to fuel a renewal in our prayer lives this week.

I know some of you do a daily Bible plan & check that list & yet struggle to pray over what you read or pray daily in private.

You may be good at tasks but you battle to seek God relationally.

Others of you get alone with God or pray in the day yet feel it's a complaining session or worry list that lacks answers.

Then some others ebb & flow in passion & practice in prayer & need influences to feed or stoke your spiritual fires.

You may need some simple steps to protect & provoke your own soul on a regular basis so that you don't drift.

I want to remind you that prayer is spiritual warfare—it is profoundly powerful & vital & is therefore vehemently opposed by indwelling sin.

Meaningful prayer is opposed by the lazy or distracted or busy mind & flesh of even the most mature Christian.

And it is surely opposed by the cultural onslaught that needs noise in the background or entertainment or media running incessantly.

Don't mistake our society's absence of quiet & avoidance of aloneness as inane technological side-effects.

They are part of the restless cravings of a culture of discontent.

Then on top of those struggles are internal battles we each face with anxiety or guilt or despair or anger or whatever else.

So it should not surprise us that prayer is not easy & that we must be equipped with motivations to pray.

We must memorize & meditate upon & trust & recite & pray truths to motivate prayer.

We need hope & help to engage in this vigilant fight for spiritual life & growth & impact & we need ammunition.

I find it hard to overstate the importance of what some call "fighter verses" for the Christian life & especially for prayer.

Prayer may be the area God has given the most outrageous promises.

We often clarify & caveat the open welcome & lavish wealth of those promises to the point of rationalizing them away.

But the Bible says expansively generous things about approaching God in prayer through the Person & work of Jesus Christ.

For example, Jesus said in John 14:13-14, "whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."<sup>14</sup> "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it."

In John 16:23 He doubly affirmed, "Truly, truly, I say to you if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name."

The Apostle John thought this was so amazing, he repeated it various ways in his letters.

1<sup>st</sup> John 5:14 says, "this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."

And Jesus illustrated such promises by noting that God is a far better than earthly fathers who give good gifts to their children.

God is far better than a sleepy neighbor & an unjust judge who answer the pleas of badgering people in times of need.

I could go on with promises & parables to motivate prayer.

I thought about just flooding you with prayer promises today to remind you of what God says & to simply ask whether you believe Him.

If we believe Him, how does that shape the priority place & personal passion that we give to prayer?

And I mean the daily private practice of prayer & also prayer through each day & I mean the precious fellowship of praying with others at regular times like meals & in meetings in small & large groups.

I want to motivate you to pray without doubting & without giving up & without questioning whether it matters.

For one text to memorize & apply to help, turn to Hebrews 4:14-16.

This is one of my favorites & I love singing its truths in the song we'll sing later entitled *Before the Throne of God Above*.

If you want a fighter verse to stoke & sustain your prayer life, start with Hebrews 4:16 & then add verses 14-15.

Follow along with me as I read Hebrews 4:14-16. [READ]

Verse 16 begins with the word 'therefore' that connects it back to what came before & makes a conclusion & application.

The main conclusion is to draw near, for the "us" who are Christians in these verses to draw near specifically to God.

Drawing near is the point—the goal is approaching God.

The word depicts someone under rule or authority seeking the favor or blessing or help of the one ruling in authority.

That's further pictured because the approach is to a throne, to God's throne as the Sovereign over history & the King over all creation.

We can be motivated by how we approach God from verse 16.

But 1<sup>st</sup> let's be motivated by why we approach God in verses 14-15.

That's the 1<sup>st</sup> of 2 motivations to pray today—be motivated by why we can approach God—by why we can pray.

When verse 16 begins with 'therefore', we ask why & connect back to the reasons given in verses 14-15.

#1—be motivated by why we can approach God, why we pray.

The reasons why we can draw near to God in prayer are all related to the Person and work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

If we have Jesus Christ as our high priest who has passed not only through the veil of the Temple once this year but through the heavens once for all, then we can pray.

If we have Jesus as our high priest entering to make atonement for us, then we can pray.

Through Jesus, we can pray directly to God without needing to go to any other priest or enter by any other sacrifice.

Jesus' life qualified Him to enter by His merit & He gives that to us.

He alone could enter with perfect holiness because He never sinned despite the extreme measures of temptation He faced.

And yet Jesus is also a high priest who has sympathized with us.

Jesus has identified with us by becoming human & facing trials & sorrows & suffering greater than we could handle.

Therefore, we draw near to Him who is an understanding, caring God.

Because Jesus had a body & shed blood as a real man & as God the Son, we can pray to Him as One who gets our feelings.

Read verses 14-15 again to see those motivations from why we can pray with precious ammunition in the fight of faith. [READ]

Everything we trust & apply should somehow lead us back to the supremacy and glory of Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

Prayer is privilege we enjoy only by of the Person & work of Christ.

You know that, but let's lift our minds afresh to the supremacy of Christ compelling us to seek Him & not to doubt or waver.

Turn back to Hebrews 1:1-4 to recall who He is.

Realize what we mean when we speak of Jesus as our High Priest & Jesus as our once-for-all sacrifice.

In modern words, we extol Jesus as our hero & champion & star.

So let's recall how absolutely glorious & amazing He is.

Read Hebrews 1:1-4. [READ]

Jesus is the Creator God who upholds all things by His powerful word as Sustaining King.

He is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of God's nature as the Son of God & God the Son.

He is far better than angels who exist to serve Him as He is the Supreme Revelation of God to man.

He is most excellent in His manhood because He lived sinlessly & died sacrificially to purify His people from sin.

He demonstrated His success & victory by sitting down at the right hand of God's majesty.

And His perfect human life & work gained Him an inheritance of all things in creation to be uniquely His as the God-man.

No one else can do all of that.

No one else can claim anything that compares to what is said of Jesus.

People write books & make movies with characters that engage our emotions & intellect as we analyze & relate to them.

But no one could make up a story like Jesus' & no one could invent a character like His as both God & man.

No one compares to Jesus & so see HIM as why we can pray.

Jesus Christ is the supreme motivation why we pray.

It's because of who Jesus is in His supreme Majesty & sinless glory & sacrificial love & finished work.

This Jesus is our high priest—meaning we go to God the Father through God the Son as He manifested Himself in bodily form.

We don't have to wonder if God will hear us when we pray banking on the One Hebrews 4:14 says is the Son of God.

And we don't have to wonder if He actually cares or understands or can relate to us because He so humbly & graciously became a Man.

Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus sympathetically & compassionately became like us even to be tempted in all things as we are.

Now turn to Hebrews 2:14-18 for a reminder of who Jesus is in His humanity as we delight in approaching God by this worthy Mediator.

We can be motivated by why we approach God in prayer as we meditate on how Perfect Jesus is to lead us to God.

Jesus is God & yet He became Man so that we would have even further reason to seek Him personally.

Read Hebrews 2:14-18 to motivate prayer knowing that He really does get it, He really does understand. [READ]

He had to be made like His brethren in all things, like us who trust Him to become spiritually descended from Abraham by faith.

Jesus became Man to be a merciful & faithful high priest.

He was merciful because we needed God's wrath satisfied for us & that required His human flesh & blood to die in our place.

To conquer death & render the devil powerless, Jesus came to experience the same humanity & temptations & He overcame.

Therefore He can free those who trust Him from sin & death & He can come to our aid when we are tempted.

So be motivated by this God-Man Jesus who leads us to God.

Be motivated to pray by WHY we can approach God through Jesus.

See this Marvelous Savior & don't doubt or waver or despair or give up & don't let the chance to pray pass you by.

Don't hear all these truths about Jesus & know all these truths as familiar stuff you've heard before & fail to respond rightly.

If you are not moved to faithfully follow God in Christ as you behold Him in Scripture, then don't be fooled that you are ok.

Many know the facts & fail to seek Him & end up lost forever.

That's why Hebrews 4:14 begins with the word 'therefore' in response to the warnings of verses 1-13 of that chapter.

When you know the history of Israel's failings & you affirm the value & power of the Word of God, there is no neutral response.

Turn to Hebrews 4 again & read verses 1-13 for that warning.

Seeking God & not giving up & not settling for something short of a real relationship with God is an issue of eternal rest.

Read Hebrews 4:1-13 to see that framed up. [READ]

The eternal rest of a right relationship with God comes to those who stop working to make themselves appear right with God.

Rest comes from ceasing works as a way to get right with God.

And yet verse 11 says to be diligent to enter that rest, to be vigilant & serious that you do not fail to respond in faith to seek Him.

Be warned that a slack or uncaring or half-hazard approach to prayer is probably a sign that you do not know God at all.

Devaluing & ignoring the privilege of prayer is likely a signal that you have not entered His rest in right relationship with God.

Someone who truly longs to be right with God, who diligently wants this rest, seeks God seriously & perseveringly.

So hear this—you can't be a Christian if you don't pray.

Praying doesn't make us Christians—no special prayer merits us into God's favor or rest.

But those who receive His grace will inevitably pray because we feel our need & we absolutely do trust Him & we want to talk to Him.

And we are so thankful & amazed that we CAN pray.

We are motivated by why we can pray, by why we can approach God.

Read Hebrews 4:14-15 again to sum up those reasons. [READ]

That's point #1—be motivated by why we can pray—be motivated to pray by why we can approach God.

Next, point #2—be motivated by HOW we can pray—be motivated to pray by HOW we can approach God.

Verses 14-15 & the background behind them renew us with a host of whys & then verse 16 renews & encourages us with several hows.

Read verse 16 again to ponder how we can pray. [READ]

In Christ we can pray with confidence—that's how we pray.

We pray frankly & fearlessly, with freedom of speech & complete openness & honesty, with boldness & assurance.

That's crazy when you realize you could be killed for approaching a king at the wrong time or in the wrong way in the Ancient Near East.

You took a risk in going there.

But that's not so at God's throne for those in Christ.

It is not like the OT presence of God in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle or Temple where only the high priest could enter once a year & only after he had been cleansed.

In our casual culture that bucks authority, we don't get this.

But the truth is that you dare not come near God's presence unless you want to get immediately & eternally fried.

That is—except if you come through Christ as your high priest.

In Christ the fear of torment & the guilty hesitance & the doubtful despair are all transformed to eager freedom.

You CAN come boldly & confidently because in Christ you are welcome & you belong at this throne seeking God.

Even if you had a bad day spiritually or a bad week or a bad month or if you didn't come yesterday or you haven't prayed much or prayed well, you can come in Christ.

You can come confessing your sins, trusting in Jesus, & confidently assured that you belong before God's throne because of Jesus.

That's how we pray because in Christ it is a throne of grace.

It's not a throne of rewards for performance or a throne of accolades for achievement or of badges for merit or of payment for work done.

It's a throne of merciful gifts flooding freely from God to those who are His in Christ.

God's throne is a place of unmerited favor because of Jesus' merits.

It's a fountain granting gifts to the undeserving who inherit everything good in Christ.

In Christ we don't come wondering if God will give what we deserve.

Instead, we come expecting God to give blessing purely based on what Jesus deserves.

Therefore we receive mercy & find grace to help in time of need as Hebrews 4:16 so beautifully promises.

That's the purpose & result expressed in this clause—it's the so that, the 'in order that'.

It's that we may receive, that we may lay hold of what's coming to us, that we might take mercy that's there.

And it's so that we find grace.

We find not punishment or God angrily "ho-humming" over our requests or sighing that we of all people dare to ask for good.

Don't think of God like that if you are in Christ.

The purpose of drawing near to God is to receive mercy & find grace.

That means God plans to withhold what we deserve & to give us freely whatever is good for us.

And He does it through prayer.

God moves through the prayers of His people because that's how He said He would work.

If you are not praying, it's no surprise if it seems He's not working.

So praying is an act of faith where we seek God to act.

Prayer is a demonstration of trust in who God is & what He has explicitly said in His Word.

And again, that means if you have faith, then you will pray.

If you don't pray, then you must not have real faith.

But if you have faith, if you trust who God is for you in Jesus, then be motivated by God's purpose to freely shower you with mercy & grace as you seek Him in prayer.

Do so all the time & do so especially in time of need as verse 16 says.

Of course, the more we understand how desperately dependent we are on God, we realize that every time is a time of need.

But sometimes the challenges & temptations seem so overwhelming that we feel greater need.

And those are the very times this promise of verse 16 is all the more inviting.

In time of need, God will give grace to help, meaning He will freely give aid, rescue, support, cure & care.

The picture of this word for help in Acts 27:17 is supporting cables wrapped around a ship undergirding it to hold it together in the midst of a horrible storm.

That's what Christians find from God as we seek Him in prayer.

We find support & embrace to hold us & keep us in His care.

We find what we truly need from God who truly knows & freely gives.

Praying in this way is praying expectantly, anchored & assured that God will give as He says.

He says He will give mercy, grace, & help to those in Christ.

He will give what is good to His children.

So draw near with confidence to this throne of grace.

Pray so that you may receive what's freely coming to you.

That's a bit of motivation from how we can pray.

We can believe Him & approach God that way because of the glorious Person & perfect work of Jesus Christ.

So when you bow your head each day alone with God and at each meal or in whatever setting, thank Him for Jesus Christ.

Thank Him for Christ crucified and risen for you.

Thank Him for Jesus as God the Son & the Son of God.

Thank Him for WHY you can pray & HOW you can pray through Jesus Christ as your high priest & Lord & Savior.

And then PRAY—pray every day.

Pray with praise & petitions & pleadings & persistence.

Pray alone & together.

Do not forget to pray or please don't forsake praying.

Don't doubt if you can pray or should pray.

Don't doubt whether God cares or hears or wants you to pray or welcomes your prayer.

Come to Him in Jesus the God-man & Mediator between God & man.

Come boldly & ask because God has welcomed you in Christ.

And come again day after day, again & again, not giving up & not tiring of seeking Him & praising Him.

Be refreshed & renewed & revived in prayer.

And take extra time to pray & to fast & pray this week as we seek God together as a church to begin this New Year.

Plan to take time to gather for the men's or ladies' prayer retreats next weekend.

Embrace the privilege & joy & rest & relief & hope & help of prayer.

Do so today & forever with gratitude & honor for Jesus Christ.

That's what we do now as we close our service in the ceremony of communion remembering all Jesus is for us.

We worship Jesus by prayer & praise for who He is & all He has done for us.

If you know Jesus as Lord & Savior, we welcome you to join us.

And if you do not know Him, we warn you not to approach God in this ceremony casually.

First watch & beg Him to open your heart to repent of sin & trust in Christ to save you.

Let today be the day of your salvation.

Seek Him in prayer as He has commanded you to do through Christ.

If we can help you, please come talk with us after the service.

Now let's bow together in prayer & praise alone quietly & then I'll lead us in prayer as we prepare to worship Jesus at His table.

Pray alone as we all prepare to remember Jesus rightly & then I'll lead us in prayer & we'll sing of our bold approach to God in prayer through Jesus Christ.