

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Ed Stoick's Message of December 13, 2009
"The Hour That Changes the World"**

[Today's message focuses on prayer by encouraging us to divide our prayer time into twelve "points of focus," such as praise, confession, petition and listening.]

[Topics: Prayer; Thanksgiving; Meditation; Listening]

Excerpt: James 5:16 tells us that, "**The prayer of a righteous man (as well as a righteous woman) is powerful and effective.**" As you can tell, prayer is the subject we're going to cover today. Much of this message is based on a book called *The Hour That Changes the World* written by Dick Eastman. It's become something of a classic in Christian literature.

It's not a very long book. Yet, it takes the Lord's Prayer and breaks it into segments that we can use to come up with a practical plan to make our prayers more effective. It contains suggestions for every Christian who wants to improve their prayer life and to change the world around them. And that's the key. Prayer changes our personal world. It changes the world of our congregation. It changes the entire world, as we shall see.

Eastman's plan divides an hour into 12 five-minute "points of focus" or segments. The idea is to come up with a consistent devotional habit of prayer. Now we all know that an hour is a long time and not many of us can accomplish that every day, but it's something for us to strive for. Once we realize how much there is to pray about, one hour will seem like a relatively short period of time.

So let's begin by reviewing why we pray. We pray because we want to communicate with God. Prayer simply brings us closer to him. He loves us; he cares about us. He loves us even if we don't pray or even if we ignore him. But it goes so much better when we communicate with him.

In **Luke 18:1**, Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. The parable was about the widow, who kept asking this official for some help. And he was a leader and didn't have to help her at all. But because of her persistence, he finally gave in and granted her request.

Why do we pray? We pray because our Lord prayed. Now there are many examples in the Bible showing Christ praying. Here's one example.

Luke 22:41-43: "He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.'"

Now, God the Father did not take the cup away from the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. But it does say that an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. So Christ's prayer was answered. We should note that along with his request he also prayed, "**Yet not my will, but yours be done.**"

Another reason to pray is that prayer brings discipline to our lives. Now our lives get kind of hectic and they begin to get out of control. Prayer just helps things settle back down.

Praying for others keeps us from selfishness. Prayer helps us focus on others and their trials and difficulties. Prayer helps keep us from disobedience to God and from temptations. While we still stray, prayer keeps us going in the right direction and helps us follow the lead of the Holy Spirit.

But, MOST OF ALL, we pray because God answers prayers! The key is that when we seek God's will, he will answer our prayers. Just this weekend, God answered many of our prayers. We had a lot of rain here in Southern California and yet there wasn't a lot of damage due to mudslides in the burned areas. Only a few homes were slightly damaged, because the catch basins worked as they were supposed to.

God also answers prayers in the world situation. There are people now out there who are willing to blow themselves up in order to kill others. So it's very reasonable to think that somebody, somewhere, would love to get a small atomic bomb and take down a whole nation, if they could. And probably the only reason that hasn't happened is because God does hear our prayers and he also has his plan and he's not going to let any thing happen to disrupt that.

Now here's a good prayer that we can all pray. Let's think about what would happen if we did earnestly pray this prayer. **Colossians 1:9, "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**

10) And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11) being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."

So that's what's available to us. And so our prayers will help us all to achieve that.

Now here are the segments as presented in *The Hour That Changes the World*. It's similar to the Lord's Prayer, which of course we know is sort of an outline for prayer.

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| 1. Praise and Worship | 7. Petitions (our needs) |
| 2. Waiting on the Lord | 8. Thanksgiving |
| 3. Confession (of our sins) | 9. Song |
| 4. Pray the Word (of God) | 10. Meditation |
| 5. Watching | 11. Listening |
| 6. Intercession (prayers for others) | 12. Praise |

Now let's go into a little more detail with each of these points of focus or segments concerning our prayer.

1 Praise and Worship is an expression of admiration and devotion to God. **Psa 115:1, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness."** At the beginning of our prayer we exalt and honor God and acknowledge who

he is with our whole being. There's so much to praise God for – his righteousness, his love, his holiness, and his omnipotence. You could pick a different theme everyday day and you wouldn't have to repeat yourself for quite a long time.

2. Waiting on the Lord is an act of surrender to, and of love and admiration for God. This is often without words. **Ps. 46:11, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."**

This is the time that we try to open our minds to God's influence and close it to everything else like interruptions and other thoughts. This is where we enter into the presence of God. During this period of silence we tune in to God himself and direct our whole being to him and commit ourselves to him anew. We rejoice in his presence.

3. Confession of sin and humiliation is an act of admitting our sinfulness to God and of cleansing us as the Temple of God. **Isaiah 59: 1-2 "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."**

The confession of sins helps us to restore our relationship to God just like it helps us to restore a relationship with anyone else. If we confess our wrongdoings and try to make amends, it can help set everything right.

This is a time of introspection and allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal all unconfessed sins. We receive salvation and the forgiveness of our sins solely through the blood of the Lord Jesus.

When confessing our sins we don't ask God to change our circumstances, but that he will change and forgive us. This reminds us of **1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."**

4. Praying Scripture is spiritual food and to pray according to God's agenda and revelation. The Word of God is our prayer manual. It reminds us of God's promises and his promises in his Word create faith in our hearts. And of course, the Bible is a book that needs to be believed and obeyed.

During this time you can ask God; "Lord, what promises can I claim, what commands must I obey, and what warnings I must pay attention to?" And of course, we ask God how to apply these Scriptures in our lives.

5. Watching is a time of spiritual observation – to be on the look out and to be spiritually aware of things to pray for. **Colossians 4:2, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."**

This is a time to be especially wary and alert for the possible onslaughts of the devil. Satan is ever out there to cause us trouble and grief. And our prayers are one of the strongest defenses we have against his wiles and his tactics.

Now we all have different places where we work and where we live and different groups we belong to. And so we need to be in tuned to things we can pray about and where we can intercede for people.

Another aspect is to ask the Lord what is on his heart and is his agenda for our congregation and us? There are people and events on our web site and in our bulletin that we need to pray for.

We need to be thinking about – are there things reported in the newspapers, on the radio or television that we should pray for? Things like economic problems, the unemployment rate, political unrest, wars, etc. that God wants us to pray for.

And of course Tiger Woods is in the news. While he's the world's wealthiest athlete and very skilled, he unfortunately has some bad habits that we can't just say was a moment of weakness in discretion. It was a pattern of behavior. Ed asked, why not pray for him instead of dumping on him as so many are. In our society, which is obsessed with celebrity, you have people who are happy to see celebrities knocked down a notch, because it seems to make them feel better.

We're not certain what's going to happen in Tiger's life, but the statement he issued seemed sincere – that he honestly wants to patch things up and try to save his family, his two children and his wife. He's even willing to give up golf indefinitely to accomplish this. If it's true and that's where his heart is, perhaps it's an answer to prayer. Hopefully something good will come of this.

6. Intercession is to pray for others, to concentrate on the needs and distress of other people, to stand in the gap for someone else. Paul writes in **1 Timothy 2:1-2, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."**

We should pray for others not only for their physical and emotional needs but also that God's purpose will be realized in their lives, that they might be drawn closer to God. We should also pray that if they are not Christians that they someday might become believers.

7. Petition for our personal needs. **Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."**

We can certainly pray for our own personal distresses, crisis situations, needs that we may have and even our desires before God. We should be able to come to God in total dependence and humility and ask him to provide for us. We know that God is merciful and rich to bless. We can be very specific in our prayers to God. But we need to watch that we are not selfish in our prayers.

8. Thanksgiving is a time to acknowledge our appreciation to the Lord for His care and protection for us. **1 Thess. 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."**

We should remember to thank God for who he is, his gifts, his answers to our prayers and for all the blessings he gives us.

9. Song is melodious praise and worship of God. **Psalms 100** is a wonderful example. **"Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come**

before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he, who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

10. Meditation means to reflect upon or examine a matter more closely and to evaluate it spiritually. **Psalm 1:1-2, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."**

Joshua 1:8 "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

We can take a specific theme from Scripture and meditate on it, such as righteousness, love, truth, peace, holiness, etc. We can also make God the main focus of our meditation – his works, his promises, his nature.

11. Listening is a period in which you receive instruction from the Lord and ask him to reveal to you the things that he wants you to notice and pay attention to. We need to find out what God wants us to do now in the congregation or among our friends or co-workers. Is there something we can do to bring God's message to others?

We can always ask God specific questions and even difficult ones that you don't have the answers to. Listening also means to listen to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit leading and guiding us.

12. Worship is to exalt and glorify God. We end our prayer session to God as we began it – with praise and worship. We need to remember that God's kingdom is coming and everything we do in our Christian lives, especially our prayers, is to prepare us for that time.

One of our goals should be – to make a difference in the lives around us. Here's a powerful example about a little boy and the impact one person made in his life.

In Phoenix , Arizona , a 26 year-old mother stared down at her 6 year-old son , who was dying of terminal leukemia. Although her heart was filled with sadness, she also had a strong feeling of determination. Like any parent, she wanted her son to grow up and fulfill all his dreams. Now , that was no longer possible.

The leukemia would see to that. But she still wanted her son's dream to come true. She took her son's hand and asked, "Billy , did you ever think about what you wanted to be once you grew up? Did you ever dream and wish what you would do with your life?"

"Mommy, 'I always wanted to be a fireman when I grew up."

Mom smiled back and said, "Let's see if we can make your wish come true."

Later that day she went to her local fire Department in Phoenix, Arizona , where she met Fireman Bob, who had a heart as big as Phoenix! She explained her son's final wish and

asked if it might be possible to give her 6 year-old son a ride around the block on a fire engine.

Fireman Bob said, "Look, we can do better than that. If you'll have your son ready at seven o'clock Wednesday morning, we'll make him an honorary Fireman for the whole day. He can come down to the fire station, eat with us, go out on all the fire calls—the whole nine yards!

"And if you'll give us his sizes, we'll get a real fire uniform for him, with a real fire hat—not a toy—one with the emblem of the Phoenix Fire Department on it, a yellow slicker like we wear and rubber boots. They're all manufactured right here in Phoenix, so we can get them fast."

Three days later Fireman Bob picked up Billy, dressed him in his uniform and escorted him from his hospital bed to the waiting hook and ladder truck.

Billy got to sit on the back of the truck and help steer it back to the fire station. He was in heaven. There were three fire calls in Phoenix that day and Billy got to go out on all three calls. He rode in the different fire engines, the paramedic's van, and even the fire chief's car. He was also videotaped for the Local news program.

Having his dream come true with all the love and attention that was lavished upon him so deeply touched Billy that he lived three months longer than any doctor thought possible.

One night all of his vital signs began to drop dramatically and the head nurse, who believed in the hospice concept that no one should die alone, began to call the family members to the hospital.

Then she remembered the day Billy had spent as a fireman, so she called the fire chief and asked if it would be possible to send a fireman in uniform to the hospital to be with Billy as he made his transition.

The chief replied, "We can do better than that. We'll be there in five minutes. Will you please do me a favor? When you hear the sirens screaming and see the lights flashing, will you announce over the PA system that there is not a fire? It's the department coming to see one of its finest members one more time. And will you open the window to his room?"

About five minutes later a hook and ladder truck arrived at the hospital and extended its ladder up to Billy's third floor open window. [Five] fire-fighters climbed up the ladder into Billy's room. With his mother's permission, they hugged him and held him and told him how much they LOVED him.

With his dying breath, Billy looked up at the fire chief and said, "Chief, am I really a fireman now?"

"Billy, you are, and the Head Chief, God is holding your hand," the chief said.

With those words, Billy smiled and said, "I know, He's been holding my hand all day, and the angels have been singing."

He closed his eyes one last time.

That's a true story and fireman Bob made a big difference in this young boy's life during his last months on earth. You may not be in a position to offer this kind of opportunity to someone in need. But your prayers can bring it about!

Now lately there's been a lot of growth of Christianity especially in Africa. But another dramatic story has unfolded in Asia and some have dubbed it "the Korean miracle." About one-third of South Koreans are now Christians. Christianity has grown from a few hundred in the late 19th century to about 9 million Protestants and 3-4 million Catholics today.

Seoul, the capital city, boasts ten of the eleven largest Christian congregations in the world. South Korea now sends more missionaries abroad than any other country except the United States.

Dr. Samuel Moffat, a professor from Princeton Theological Seminary, recently said that he and his wife had experienced the Korean miracle first hand. He was born in Korea and grew up there. He and his wife became missionaries for 25 years starting 1955 after the Korean had ended.

They had watched South Korea turn into an economic wonderland, move from authoritarianism to democracy, and become a bastion of Christianity. Dr. Moffat also said that Koreans are natural evangelists. They love to tell the good news. Today thousands of Koreans rise to attend prayer services in huge city churches at 4:30 AM, before heading for work.

Their prayer life is remarkable and the whole congregation prays together. In the country churches you sometime have to ring a bell to get them to stop. Prayer has certainly made a tremendous difference in that country.

Here are a few practical steps to improve our prayer life: Find the very best time for you to pray, and declare your commitment daily either mentally or verbally. One example is to say, "The most important appointment I have today is my appointment with Jesus in prayer."

Now when Jesus was praying in the garden, just before he was taken captive to be crucified, he came back and found the disciples had fallen asleep. While he loved them very much, he was probably disappointed in them. And he said to them. "Couldn't you watch with me one hour?"

So let's take Jesus' comment to heart and resolve to spend a little more time in prayer and to make certain that we are covering all of these areas that were mentioned this morning. Since God loves us, we should make every effort to put together a system that will help our prayers more effective and to make our time of prayer the most valuable we can.

Heartfelt prayer can make us better instruments for God in his plan to change the world.

General Group Question: How important is prayer in your life? Please give an example of the power of prayer that has been answered.

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. Why do you believe Jesus prayed since he was the Son of God?
2. What central point seemed to dominate his prayers? Should that be the central point to your prayers as well? Why?
3. How difficult is it for you to wait upon the Lord when praying about a specific situation or a person? Briefly give an example.
4. Why should we pray for others?
5. What are some of the things you are thankful to God for?
6. What have you recently meditated about?
7. Could you give an example of how you listened to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your thoughts?
8. What moved you the most about the story of the six-year-old boy dying from terminal leukemia?
9. How does prayer draw you closer to God?