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**Title:** Week 6 - Corporate Prayer

**Speaker:** Rev. Tony Thomas

### **Introduction**

- So we've gone over Life Groups and our Yearly, Weekly Rhythms and Values
- The next 3 weeks are going to be focused on Church Gathered - Sundays - and what do we do on Sundays?
  - Corporate Prayer
  - Sunday School
  - Corporate Worship
    - \* Today will be Corporate Prayer
- But let me share before I get into more teaching - some thoughts from my own personal journey with prayer - because certainly my teaching and convictions about prayer - are very much shaped by the places I've been disciplined in prayer by
- So when it comes to prayer - I definitely had seeds of people in my life in my childhood that planted in me the vital importance and power of prayer
  - I think I shared in my testimony about seeing my own mom praying for me when I was lost
  - Then I had this accountability group with these brothers from my church youth group - and we had these intense and lengthy times of prayer and crying out to the Lord together
- But certainly one of the most influential impacts on my prayer life was from my previous church - Covenant Fellowship Church (CFC) - which was largely Korean
  - And I often say this - various cultures bring various blessings into the wider church of Christ
    - \* American / Western church - I learned theology, but also just kindness and encouragement in the culture
    - \* Indian church - I learned how the church is like extended family
    - \* Korean church - I think has brought the gift of prayer to the wider church
  - And so, I shared the whole schedule of CFC last week - but I'll remind you of the prayer meetings - Sunday Missions Prayer 7-8pm, Monday-Friday morning prayer 630-730am, Pastors prayer Tuesday 9am-12pm, Wednesday Night 10pm-3am, Thursday Congregational PM 7-9pm, Saturday leaders meeting and prayer 8am-12pm - and so, yes it was pretty crazy...but at the same time...I am grateful for the ways I was disciplined in prayer...for a season God allowed me to be a son of the Korean church and for that I'm truly grateful
  - But, also I had the chance to be influenced by certain Indian missionaries and pastors that have also been influential to my thinking about prayer
- But, let me give a few examples of how being in the Korean church - helped me to see things in Scripture and be disciplined in prayer in ways I wasn't in other cultural contexts
  - In Hebrews it tells us Jesus prayed with loud cries and tears...not silently or doing popcorn style - and you often hear in Korean churches...people crying out with loud cries and tears in prayer

- In the Gospels...we see Jesus praying early in the morning and praying all night – and in Korean churches they hold early morning prayer at the church and they hold all night prayer times
- In Gethsemane Jesus tells his disciples could you not pray with me for “one hour” – and if you look at the original Greek text its “mian horan” which if you study it translates to this in English...”one hour”...MEANING extended time in prayer for an hour for was not a strange thing to Jesus and he thought his disciples should be able to pray an hour as well
- In Luke...we see the tax collector beating his breast at the conviction of his sin - again something you see in prayer amongst Koreans and African cultures too
- In Acts...we see the early church praying aloud and it says the room was shaken...so loud prayer meetings seem to be happening in the New Testament church
- And then, I haven’t gotten into praying in tongues - but I’ll table that and say if someone wants my thoughts, we can discuss that during discussion time
- Now, I just shared ways we prayed, but what would compel people to pray that much?
  - Well because we saw God’s Spirit worked mightily - people walked into services and you almost tangibly could sense God’s presence, people were being brought to faith in Christ - we had some of the most amazing testimonies of people saved Chinese atheist international students, African American Muslims, people with physical disabilities, people from Hindu backgrounds, but not only salvation stories, but Christians being freed from addictions and sins, people being called to missions and vocational ministry
- And so, I would say this - again as we are Joy of All Nations - one of my hopes is that we truly learn to recognize the blessings of various church cultures...and seek to take in and celebrate the blessings in our church
  - \* Now, I think we can say a lot of ethnic churches - Indian, Korean, African - can truly be guilty of veering towards legalism and making a religion out of the spiritual disciplines - that the more you pray, read the Bible, go to church - the more you are considered higher on a spiritual ladder, more loved by God
    - But we have to EMPHATICALLY say - that is not the Gospel - the Gospel is that we’re accounted righteous and loved - irrespective of our progress or lack of progress in the Christian life
  - BUT, a large reason I value our discipleship pathway is...we’re at the same time NOT saying the means of grace and growth in Christ is meaningless BECAUSE the Gospel is true
    - \* No the Gospel is our ground...but from that ground of security in Christ...we do grow - and specifically we really should STRIVE to be people of desperate prayer
    - \* And also the Gospel gives me humility to say - hey, are there things I can learn and be disciplined from other cultures and possibly apply some things...maybe not everything?
      - I think a healthy Christian and especially at Joy of All Nations - we would want to say, yes
- And so let me share with us now some thoughts and convictions on prayer - from God’s Word, but also from having been disciplined in prayer in different cultural contexts
- Outline
  - 1. What is prayer?

- 2. How does God answer prayer?
  - \* First two points are more foundational teaching on prayer
- 3. Why does Joy of All Nations need to pray?
- 4. How will Joy of All Nations pray?
  - \* These last two points are more specific to our context

## **1. What is prayer?**

- There's a lot I could probably say but I'm going to try and keep it high level and more theological

### **1. The Word and prayer are inseparable, but the Word still has primacy**

- First, I'd say this - when it comes to the means of grace - two stand out in many ways as the most prominent and central and from which other means of grace flow out of: God's Word and Prayer
  - I kind of like to say - they're like a marriage - what God has put together, let not man separate...we read the Word prayerfully and we pray the Word
  - But there is somewhat of a parallel in marriage where God calls men to lead their wives - I do believe there's a leadership of the Word in its marriage to prayer - because the Word is God's way of telling us who He is and what is true...and we pray in response to that truth of God found in His Word
- Another picture I give people is that a Word-less prayer life is like putting gasoline on a fire - you can create fire, but it dies out quickly
  - But Word-based prayer life is like logs of wood for a fire - you can burn in prayer with greater length and depth because you are praying based on God's Word

### **2. The essence of prayer - "Desire and Dependence"**

- OK so I wanted to establish the Word as foundational and giving leadership to prayer, but lets focus our time now on prayer itself - what is it? How do we pray?
  - As we look at Scripture - there are all sorts of prayers - prayers of confession, thanksgiving, adoration, lament, intercession, imprecatory prayers (praying curses on your enemies)
    - \* But I do think we can take all those types of prayer which are valuable to still learn and practice
    - \* But I think we can still essentialize all prayers found in Scripture and in our lives into two main categories of: prayers of desire and prayers of dependence
- **1. Prayers of Desire** - The greatest aim of prayer God gives us is that we "desire Him and His kingdom" more than anything else
  - And in prayer we should be declaring how much we yearn and long for God
    - \* **1. Desiring God - Psalm 63:1 - O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water**
      - And so we adore God because of how desirable He is, we thank God for giving Himself to us, we confess because we have not desired Him as we should

- So desiring God is central
- But we not only desire God Himself...but if you desire God you can't help but to desire God for this world...His kingdom and glory to fill the earth
  - \* **2. Desiring God's kingdom - *Matthew 6:9-10 - 9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.***
    - So our desires for God are not private - "I want God"...but "I want God's kingdom to expand" to fill the lives of others, to fill the entire earth
- **2. Prayers of Dependence** - But another part of prayer is "dependence" - because while "desire for God" shows that we're created to love God and spread His love...dependence shows that we are weak and impotent and powerless in any of these things apart from God's help - so the other pole of prayer after desire is dependence
  - **1. Dependence for desiring God - *Psalm 51:10 - Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.***
    - \* We need to depend on God by His Spirit to work in us to even give us desires for Him
  - **2. Dependence for expanding God's kingdom - *Acts 1:8 - 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.***
    - \* We see that the disciples were waiting in prayer and the Spirit came upon them and empowered them to preach the Gospel with power
- **3. Prayers of Desire rightly align Prayers of Dependence** - So desire and dependence are both the essence of prayer - but be reminded that right desires rightly align our dependence
  - Because we can pray and depend on God to give us answers to prayer - but our desires might be misaligned
    - \* ***James 4:3 - You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.***
  - So our desires must be shaped God-ward first in prayer...and then we depend on God in prayer for delivering those God-ward desires
- Let me give this final teaching point on prayer - to connect it to how prayer connects to God's deepest motive which is His own passion for His own glory...how does our prayers glorify Him?

### **3. God delights in prayer because our desire and dependence glorifies Him as Highest Treasure (desire) and Mightiest Savior (dependence)**

- God wants to be glorified as the more truly desirable and satisfying Being in the universe - which He is...so our desiring God in prayer glorifies God as the one who alone satisfies our deepest longings
  - So, our prayers of desire glorify God as our Highest Treasure
- And God wants to be glorified as the giver of all good things - and apart from Him we have nothing and can do nothing...so our dependence upon God in prayer also glorifies God as the one who alone can deliver our deepest longings
  - So, our prayers of dependence glorify God as our most Mighty Savior

## **2. How does God answer prayer?**

- Now a major question we all probably wrestle with in regards to prayer is - God's answers to prayer
  - Now one thing we have to trust is that God is infinitely wiser than us - so while we may ask God freely...God also has sovereign say as to what He ordains to be done
  - But I think what is key to remember is His answers to His asking children is always from the motive of what's best for His children
    - \* So we'll consider his 3 answers to prayer as "No", "Wait", and "Yes", but more importantly lets consider his motive in those answers
- **1. No - its not good for you**
  - Sometimes, God as our Father, like any good parent, has to say "no" to the believers prayer
  - Sometimes because its downright sinful or worldly
  - But what about good things?
    - \* I can share for us - we wanted to plant in Chicago-area originally...we prayed, felt convicted, was confirmed by many...and God through various circumstances - the answer was "No"
  - In that moment it was confusing and hard, but now as we plant here in Atlanta - we see 1000 different ways God was so wise and caring for us in saying "no" to that prayer
    - \* Now here's the harder thing - sometimes the answer is "No" and God on this side of heaven won't show you the answer...so in faith we trust Him still as good
- **2. Wait - its not good for you yet**
  - Sometimes God wants us to endure in prayer for something - and again I can give the church planting story for us
    - \* We felt called to church plant in Chicago...3 years ago
      - Chicago was "No" and church planting wasn't "No" but "Wait"
  - And there were different things God was doing in us and outside of us for the perfect timing - and so "wait" was God's answer to that prayer
  - An illustration I once heard on this helped me tremendously as well
    - \* There's a man told by God to push on a bolder to make it move
    - \* So the man pushes and pushes for years and years - but with no success
    - \* And finally one day, afters many years God comes and MOVES the bolder
    - \* And the man is amazed, but also flabbergasted - and asks God, "Why did you make me labor and push all these years and you never moved this bolder when you could have? All these years of me pushing were useless!"
    - \* And God smiles and tells the man, well look at your body - and the man looks and he is jacked! Full of muscles that he previously didn't have
  - Our years of waiting and persevering in prayer - that doesn't seem to be bearing fruit - it really is
    - \* And most of all...God is often growing and doing something significant in us first before He is going to move that boulder we are asking Him to move
- **3. Yes - I want to give this and I delight in your asking**

- Now, I think we all know - yes, of course God answers prayer...I just need help understanding why he says, “No” and “Wait”
- BUT, I want to stop and remind us...that God does say “YES” to prayer
- ***Matthew 7:7 - Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you***
  - \* And sometimes I do think we think of God as someone with his arms folded and crossed...not wanting to give
    - But NO - He’s a Father in heaven saying - ASK...and I’ll give...I WANT TO GIVE
- Or if I can motivate us another way, ***James 4:2 - You do not have, because you do not ask***
  - \* I mean how simple and straightforward is that? - You don’t have what you really desire which is good and for God’s glory and your good...and the reason, because we’ve not prayed...we’ve not asked
    - God would want to give it!
      - But again, He is glorified in being the one who is asked by us and then He LOVES to give
      - Our problem is...we too often are found not asking, not praying

### **3. Why does Joy of All Nations need to pray?**

- Now in some sense of all we said about prayer - any person or any church should be convinced...we are all helpless without the Lord’s help - and thus we need to pray
- But, I actually want to help us think through why we, Joy of All Nations, in particular needs to be a praying a church
  - And while we are a church that does desire to reach all the nations - we are at the same time aware of a unique calling and desire to reach the Indian and South Asian community
    - \* So let me speak specifically now...of the spiritual hardships and battles involved in reaching this community
- One thing we did a few years ago in Perimeter was to think about reaching South Asians in Atlanta and we started to consult with various leaders in that area. Here are a few things we learned together.
  - **1. The hard soils of South Asians**
    - \* South Asians that are coming into the US are for the most part - wealthy, educated, they speak English, and they are religious (mostly Hindu, next Muslim)
      - Think about it - wealth and Education are not evil in themselves, but the Scriptures point to how wealth and knowledge can be barriers for people following Christ
        - But other immigrant groups come often with physical needs and so ministry to physical needs can be done to open hearts...but not really with Indians - definitely not in this area
      - Then what about English? - There are many Chinese who come to the US who also had wealth and education...we saw this in our campus ministry a lot
        - But, many Chinese came wanting to work on their English and so doing ESL type programs - and God was using ESL to help Chinese read the Bible and come to Christ

- But again, doesn't work with Indians since English is one of the official languages in India and most Indians know English already
- Then, what about religion? - Many people are secular and agnostic or atheist... Americans, most Chinese, Japanese
  - And to preach the Gospel can be hard - but its bringing a person with no real religious connection to one where they turn to Christ
  - But with an Indian - you are bringing them from Hinduism or Islam or Sikhism...and out of that which is deeply connected to their family and culture...and then bringing them to Christ
  - So there are 3 huge barriers of religion and then family and community
- \* OK, so not just one factor, but many HUGE ones - wealth, education, English they are sufficient, religious convictions, family, culture - it makes the SOIL of reaching Indians and South Asians incredibly hard as compared to almost any people group
  - And if you speak to other campus ministers or church planters or missionaries - I think you find similar conclusions
- **2. The Hindu influence in Atlanta**
  - \* For some, this is theologically debated, but its that there are territorial spirits connected to lands based on the history of that place, the worship patterns, and the sins and idols of that place - which can cause specific hindrances to Gospel advance in certain areas
  - \* And Atlanta has been specifically identified as being a particularly hard place spiritually
    - Some of the things that were brought up about that was the impact of the Hindu sect - BAPS that planted a temple in Lilburn
      - At one time it was the largest in North America, now that is in New Jersey
      - But in 2004 a ceremony was held with other Atlanta government officials to lay initial stones of the temple and the ceremony is meant to purify the land
      - And then the government officials that were there also gave the key to the city to the Hindu priest who was essentially God-incarnate for that sect
    - And from that time to now - Atlanta was never known really as a place with many Indians - but now its grown tremendously
  - \* Also from our consult, it was shared how various attempts to plant churches or impact South Asians in Atlanta in the past had fallen short or faced various attacks and ended
    - And then our consult also felt it was significant that Ravi Zacharias whose home base was here in Atlanta - obviously after his death went through a tremendous fall from grace
  - \* And so all this to say - Indians yes have flooded this city...again South Forsyth is the fastest growing the United States
    - And yet, we would be naive to only attribute that to socioeconomics and not see there are spiritual forces also at work to advance the Hindu faith
- **3. The need for united prayer**
  - \* And so one of the final walkaways from our consultation conversations was that - there really is no "model" church making strong headway amongst Hindus - it is very much a pioneering work

- \* And so really the main walkaway was - the most important thing we need to do is pray...pray for breakthrough
  - Pray united as churches, pray united across the city
- And so, does every church need to pray?
  - Yes and Amen - every church must pray
  - But there are certain missions which certain churches are called to which are particularly difficult soil and involves powerful demonic forces working against the church
    - \* And so we think Joy of All Nations is called to be one of those types of the churches - and therefore we need to be a praying church - because God alone can breakthrough

#### **4. How will Joy of All Nations pray?**

##### **Personal**

- Well, let me touch briefly on some things I am seeking to do personally to be praying for our church - beyond my own regular daily prayer habits
  - On Friday mornings for almost the last year I think now, I've been prayer driving through South Forsyth area - going up 141 to South Forsyth High School then usually down Windmere and Old Atlanta Road - passing other schools like Daves Creek Elementary, South Forsyth Middle, Lambert
    - \* So seeking in prayer that Jesus and His Presence would lay claim to this land - and that influence of prayer walking and prayer driving to claim a land for Christ was impressed on me from some Indian pastors and missionaries
  - Also something that I'd been disciplined in over years especially in the Korean church has been to seek God in prayer and fasting as a regular spiritual discipline - and so I've been doing once a week fasting and been seeking to do that as well
    - \* Now do I keep these commitments always and perfectly? No, I don't - but when I fall, the Lord gives me grace to get back up
  - And then another thing we did was develop a specific prayer team for our family and this church and this generally from missionaries from many contexts - for spiritual protection because we've heard so many stories of especially attacks that come on the family...but also that for everything we do that we'd have a team of people praying for us for God's Spirit to breakthrough
    - \* So there's about 15 people in that group all outside our church and spread out and many are older family members - but people specifically who have a gift or calling for prayer
  - And I share those things for a few reasons - one is to pull back the curtain a little bit on my own life:
    - \* Now sure one part of me sharing is to not just be a teacher of the Word, but to model what I am teaching from the Word
    - \* But I share this also to help us feel not impressed by me in any way, but what I want you to walk away with instead is this
      - I want you to feel WITH ME the desperate and impossible situation we are in as we plant this church and how DESPERATELY we are in need of God's Spirit and power as we plant this church



- And I desire you all to join me in prayer - because I believe the Scripture teaches us that there is a unique and synergistic power from corporate, united prayer of the church compared to just individuals praying on their own
- \* And one of the places we see the principle of the power of corporate prayer is:
  - **Matthew 18:19-20 - 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**
  - Now the context of these verses are dealing with how to appropriately deal with church discipline, but there is this generalized principle for the church - in when the church comes together - asking the Father in prayer - it will be done and Christ's special presence is there
  - I believe this is pointing us to a reality that - there is a unique, synergistic power that comes from when we pray TOGETHER...compared to when we just pray by ourselves
- \* And so with that principle, here's the ways I hope we can be corporately praying together
  - 1. Corporate Prayer Culture, 2. Corporate Prayer Meetings

## **1. Corporate Prayer Culture**

### **• 1. Praying before serving**

- One thing Marilyn and I have done is when we have people coming over like hosting our bible study - we pray together for God's blessing on that time
- And so, I hope couples or serving teams would pray together - whether you are hosting a Life Group, or setting up chairs, or doing Sunday school, leading worship - find a way best you can to say...hey before we start "let's pray"
- \* And again in the Korean church I saw that modeled so well - prayerful dependence for any team that served...there was always prayer beforehand
  - Even we as pastors in setting up communion - back then we poured the juice into each cup - and each cup we poured - we were praying for people
- \* So, I hope that is our prayer culture to be people that we really do stop to pray as groups...so please, don't be shy to do it

### **• 2. Praying during meetings**

- Hopefully you've seen this modeled, but praying to start and end discipleship or Bible study or praying during a one-on-one meeting for the meal and praying afterwards - that all can and ought to be normal...just part of our culture is my hope
- \* And the heart of that again is whatever we may be doing in terms of horizontal relationships - we want to be able to connect that vertically to Christ through praying together

## **2. Corporate Prayer Meeting**

- Remember I came from a Korean culture of church where we had A LOT of corporate prayer meetings weekly. Then, on the other end of the spectrum - there are churches that don't really have a weekly congregational prayer meeting. But for us, for now my conviction and plan is

that we meet once a week for corporate prayer as a church and right now, the plan is we actually do that on Sunday before we do Sunday school and worship

- Now, could that change in the future? Yes, we can be open about that - but my hope is to keep that “Sunday+1” idea instead of creating multiple church commitments through the week...and instead free up time to be faithful and missional in your different life callings through the week
- But, one reason for desiring Sunday mornings is that we’d use that morning prayer time to ask God’s Spirit to fill and anoint the ministry that will happen - Sunday school, Corporate worship, but also all the other things in the life of the church
  - \* And even specifically I would say - if you have a specific prayer need for a physical illness - here is one of the places we would practice James 5 where it says, ***James 5:14 - 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.***
  - \* And right now we pray at 9:15-9:45am and Gordon is our prayer leader and doing a great job and we’ll keep this pattern of prayer on Sundays as we prepare for public launch as well
- If you’ve been part of church or ministry long enough - you have been to churches or services where for SOME REASON...the worship, the Word from the preacher...seems to touch the heart more deeply - there’s spiritual power or what some call “anointing” or “unction” present
  - Why is that? - I think usually it’s because there’s praying people in that church
  - So...here's a good practical application - if at some point you may not be enjoying or being blessed by my sermons...it may be hard for me to hear that...but I’d want to know how I can improve
    - \* But I would say...maybe a good rule is...its best not to comment directly on the preacher’s sermons...until you’re faithfully coming week by week to pray for God's anointing on the preaching first
- There’s a story that 19th Century English preacher Charles Spurgeon - often called the Prince of Preachers - 1000s came to Christ through his ministry. Now, he had a group of young pastors with him visiting his church and he showed them the sanctuary and they were impressed how massive it was
  - But, then Spurgeon told them - I want to take you to my “Boiler Room” and the young ministers were a little disturbed, because Boiler Rooms weren’t very interesting places to visit
  - But then Spurgeon actually took them to the basement of the church where there was about 100 people praying - and he told the ministers - “This is my Boiler Room”
  - And so, Spurgeon when asked by people what the secret of his ministry was - he would reply, “My people pray for me”
- Brothers and sisters - one thing I’d say is different from maybe how Spurgeon saw the church was...the church then really was centered on the preaching
  - But our church is going to be BOTH church gathered and church scattered - there will be Word preached Sunday, but Monday-Saturday the Word is still being preached in your homes, in your work places, in our communities, in how you coach flag football, in our Life Groups, in our Fall Sports Fest

- \* And my prayer is - you all...this whole church will be on fire...because there's a source of power we have found from being a church that is praying together