

## TWIN LAKES FELLOWSHIP

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### “Praying Biblically”

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I'd just like to start with the central, distinctive principles of Protestantism, the *solas* from the Reformation (Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, Scripture alone, God's glory alone) and let's ask ourselves whether or not those principles have any impact on the way that we do worship.

#### *Sola Christi.*

**Does it make any difference about the way that we worship?** The Reformers sure thought it did. They completely revolutionized the eucharistic theology and practice of the church, and so they came to understand, in light of the finality of Christ's work upon the cross, His once for all death for sinners and His sole mediation on their behalf...they came to understand that the Lord's Supper was indeed a supper and not a sacrifice. It was a meal, not a mass. It was to be administered on a table, not an altar; so, the furniture, the decoration of the church began to change, and the whole task of ministry began to change – or one's understanding of the ministry. The person administering that supper was a pastor, not a priest. So a whole re-thinking of the nature of the ministry began on the basis of the principle of *Sola Christi*.

#### **Now how about *Sola Fide*?**

Does the principle of *sola fide* make any difference in the way that we do worship? That we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone? Does that make an impact on what we do and what we don't do in worship? Well, the Reformers thought it did. We're justified by faith alone, and if faith comes by hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17), then that means that we better fill our services with Scripture. And that means that when we preach, we're going to preach expositively; and that means that what we read is going to be Scripture, and we're going to read it systematically, sequentially, like the *lectio continuo* readings of Scripture; and it's going to be Scriptures, it's not going to be the lives and legends of the saints which were often read on saint's days. No, it's going to be Scripture that we read.

**When we sing**—and we are going to sing because another implication of *sola Christe* is the priesthood of all believers, and so we're not going to be content to have monastic choirs sing on our behalf, but we're going to join in that singing and we're going to sing congregationally. Well, what's going to be the content of our singing? It's going to be Scripture. It was Luther who first suggested that we ought to begin to put the Psalms to music and sing them, as had been the practice in the patristic church. So the church began to sing Psalms and biblical canticles, other songs outside of the Psalter. And when the church wrote hymns, it wrote hymns that were loaded with biblical and theological content.

**And when we pray.** They were very concerned, going all the way back to Bucer's seminal defense of worship. It's called *Grund und Ursach* – “ground and reason,” hmm? Something like that. *Grund* is “ground” and *Ursach* is “reason.” (I'm looking at the Germans amongst us! Something like that!) [*Laughter*] He says when we pray we need to have scriptural content in our prayers. They were discontent with the prayers of the late medieval liturgy.

Why? Because faith comes by hearing the word of Christ. Because we are sanctified by God's word of truth. Because we are born again by the living and abiding word of God. Because we grow by the pure milk of the word...and so forth. So if we are justified by faith alone, and if

faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, then it's going to alter what we do in our worship services. Our services, the basic elements of our worship service, are going to be filled with Scriptural content.

### **How about *Sola Scriptura*?**

Does that make an impact on the way that we do worship? Well, the Reformers thought it did. *Sola Scriptura* means that we would worship according to Scripture; we would go to the Bible itself to get our cues as to what we should do and what we shouldn't do. And they therefore settled on very simple basic elements of preaching and praying and singing, and the administration of the sacraments, and so forth; and they then got rid of a whole lot of stuff that couldn't be justified by Scripture. So if there was anything that was extra-Scriptural in terms of ceremonies and rituals and gestures and language, as Luther said, "We must remove everything that smacks of sacrifice." He said that in his *German Mass*, as I recall. He also said in *Babylonian Captivity* (this is 1520)...he said, "We're going to have to design a whole new ceremony"... a whole new approach to worship, in other words, based upon the theological insights that were flowing out of the Reformation. So, yes, we need to get rid of the things that can't be justified – the pictures, the statuary, the rituals, the ceremonies, the symbols, the gestures, the postures that can't be justified.

### **How about *Sola Gratia*?**

Does the teaching of grace alone make an impact of how we do worship? By *sola gratia* we understand that God initiates our salvation; that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone. But it places all the initiative of our salvation... "Salvation is of the Lord."

Well, if that's the case, does that make any impact upon our worship? Well, I think it does. And Hughes Old has said in a number of places and a number of times that the theology of the Holy Spirit is central to Reformed worship, and the way in which the principle of *sola gratia* gets expressed is, one, it's in terms of the simplicity and the internality, the spirituality of our worship (we aim at the heart), but also in terms of our over-expression of dependence upon God in prayer, so that as a result of the Reformation there was a revolution in prayer.

A number of commentators over the years have characterized Protestant worship as a preaching service devoid of much else—preliminaries, and then the sermon. Well, I think that that could not be further from the truth, if we're talking about classic Protestantism. There was a Eucharistic revolution. That should be clear. That should be obvious. There was a revolution in church song. Luther is called "the father of congregation hymnody," and we owe congregational psalmody to Calvin. It was really his drive and initiative that saw to it that Psalters were produced. Louis Benson, the Presbyterian church historian, particularly the historian of hymnody at the turn of the century, said it was all really the fruit of one man's will and labor, and that's Calvin. Well, there was a revolution in church song.

There was a revolution in preaching, for sure, as the principle of *lectio continua*, sequential expository preaching, took root wherever Reformed Protestantism went, and there was as well – and if you don't believe me, at least believe Dr. Old, because he's really the great scholar who I'm about convinced knows more about the history of worship (never mind Reformed worship, but the history of worship) than the whole rest of the world combined. But he speaks of a revolution in prayer that took place: that the Reformers restored to the ordinary worship of the Lord's Day a full diet [as he calls it] of prayer, restoring the prayer of invocation, the prayer of illumination, the prayers of intercession to the regular worship of the church.

So does our theology drive us in the direction of a kind of worship? I think that we make a great mistake in not seeing the connection between the central distinctive of Protestantism, and

in particular the essential distinctive of Reformed Protestantism, and how we then go about doing worship.

### **The reform of worship.**

I think the historians have really missed something here, and I'm waiting for the book to be written. But I think the Reformation has been considered at length in its political aspects, in its social aspects, and in its theological aspects. But there's a sense in which what was happening here as much as anything else was there was a revolution taking place in worship. And I'm awaiting the book – somebody like Dr. Old needs to write it – in which the Reformation is evaluated and recalled chronologically in terms of the reform of worship and the theology that drives that reform. The idea that we can just take Reformed theology and graft on to it any form of worship I think is sadly misleading. And what I suspect is that the attempt to do so will render Reformed theology a dead letter. It will become an abstract, distant, impractical set of philosophical convictions to which we nod on occasions before we turn around and go about the business [sorry, Carl!] of doing church and doing worship, because it's in our worship that our theology takes on flesh, and I think there's a sense in which prayer is the ultimate in applied theology. As we pray, we are praying the great truths that we have come to understand on the basis of Scripture.

So let me then get to my outline.

### **I. The importance of prayer.**

**Prayer is the means... First of all, it's important because it is the means by which we draw near to God. It is the means by which we draw near to God.** And so do yourself a little favor and do a little study of the phrase *draw near*. That's a way in which the biblical writers frequently refer to what we are doing as we pray. For example, Hebrews 4:15-16 –

“We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore...”  
[what?] “...*draw near* with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace.”

There's my proof text for prayer as a means of grace. The *Heidelberg Catechism*...that we may find grace. How do we find grace? By drawing nearer to the throne of grace? How do we do that? By prayer. We receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So it's by prayer that we draw near to God, that we call upon Him and pursue fellowship with Him – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**It's the means by which we express our dependence upon the Holy Spirit.** What would be the implication of not praying in a worship service (which is happening to a significant degree today)? Prayer is not very exciting for a lot of people, and if you're seeker driven, you're not going to do a whole lot of praying. That's not going to be understood and it's not going to be exciting enough.

But what would be the implication of not praying? Obviously, the implication of not praying is that one is saying that one is self sufficient. One is not dependent upon the Holy Spirit; that one is able to proceed in one's own strength. And the inverse, then, would be true. What is the implication of praying is that we are dependent upon God for everything. It is a denial of self-sufficiency. It is a statement that we are dependent upon God in our worship, in our preaching. We are dependent upon God as we exercise the means of grace and as we live the whole

Christian life. That's why we kneel. That's why we pray. That's why we draw near to God. We need grace. We need mercy. We need His strength. We need His power. Prayer expresses our dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and when should we not be expressing that dependence upon God for all things, if not when we assemble together in worship?

### **Third, it is a means of experiencing the gospel.**

A number of our contemporaries are talking about the need to preach the gospel to ourselves, and I don't argue with that. I think that's right. I think that's true. I think we do that every week.

I think by prayer we experience the gospel for ourselves. When we pray, we draw near to God. When we pray, we begin by contemplating the greatness of God in our opening prayers of praise and invocation and our opening hymns of praise. When we reflect upon the greatness of God, we, in the light of that greatness, receive a fresh glimpse of ourselves as lowly. We are finite; He is infinite. He is holy; we are corrupt. And so we confess our sins. And as we confess our sins, we look to the cross and we plead the cross and the virtues of the cross, and the virtues of the One who bore our sins in His body on the tree, and who died – the just for the unjust – that He might bring us to God. So we recall the gospel and the promises of the gospel: that if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. And then we begin to seek Him for all things that are necessary: for the indwelling and filling and power of the Holy Spirit, and for the Spirit's sanctifying influences, and that the Holy Spirit will conform us to the image of Christ and to the image of God as His beloved children, and that we would walk in love even as He is love, and so forth and so on.

I think prayer is the means by which we experience the gospel, week in and week out, in our public services. As we move from the greatness of God to the confession of our sins, to contemplation of the cross in prayer, and the assurances of pardon, and as we then call upon Him for the strength that we need for living, and for life for ourselves and for our families, and so forth and so on.

I really first began to experience this still as a student at Trinity College in Bristol, and it was the experience of going to chapel every day and using *The Prayer Book* (and I don't want to use a prayer book anymore. I don't like the prayer book per se, although I love a number of the prayers in *The Prayer Book*). But it was that experience of every day experiencing the refreshing of confessing sin and hearing the assurances of pardon, either prayed or stated. And I was very disappointed as a student when I came back to the U.S. and went to Gordon-Conwell and the chapel was not a chapel! It was a song and a lecture, and it really grieved me to think, "Why are we not engaging in the kind of God-centered, God-seeking prayers that we experienced in chapel at Trinity College in Bristol, Anglican though it be?"

So it's the means by which we and our people experience the gospel from praise to confession to assurance, and to thanksgiving and joy in recalling the forgiveness of our sins, our justification, our adoption, our ongoing sanctification, our ultimate glorification...all the gifts of the gospel that are ours for which we give thanks. All that is experienced, it seems to me, through public prayer properly done.

### **It is the foundation of congregational prayer life.**

All other prayer groups build on the public prayers of the church when it gathers. It's only then, I think, that we have the whole congregation, is in our Sunday assemblies. The whole church has gathered. That's when I think in particular the promise of Matthew 18, "when two or more are gathered in My name"... that whole context of discipline and prayer...it seems to me that that implies we're talking about the regular gathering of the whole church, not what a little

group here or there is doing. But all other prayer groups build upon the public prayer life of the church.

**Moreover, it is through the prayers of the pastor that the church learns how to pray.**

It provides the model for family prayer, and small group prayer, and private prayer. If you recall your own experience, you will probably realize that your understanding of prayer has been more “caught” than taught. I think somebody said that yesterday – more caught than taught... more overheard than learned by reading and study.

How do regular folks learn how to pray? They learn it by overhearing their ministers. They learn it by hearing the pastor in prayer. He provides the pattern. It’s through the pastor’s prayers that they learn how to address God, that they learn how to praise Him, that they learn how to confess their sins, that they learn how to give thanks for the assurances of pardon. They learn the things that are most important for petitions and intercessions. All the whole prayer life of the congregation is built upon the prayer life of the church as it gathers. In other words, it’s built on the public prayers of the pastor. He is teaching his congregation how to pray, whether he intends to do so or not. I believe that’s what’s going on.

I think it’s a part of our teaching ministry. I don’t think we ought to go up there thinking that we’re teaching, but I think we need to realize that that in fact is what we are doing. This is a form of pulpit speech. This is what all the previous generations of Reformed people understood. That’s why they include prayer in their preaching manuals. They would have whole sections on prayer – preaching section, prayer section. Why? Because it’s another form of public speech. It’s another form of public teaching. And as you pray you’re not only doing that which prayer intends to do in drawing near to God, but you’re also then laying the foundation for the prayer lives of people in their closets and families as they assemble, and as small groups gather for prayer. It’s vital for the foundation of congregational prayer life.

**And, fifthly, it’s important because it’s through public prayer rightly done that we can begin to reverse the current malaise.**

And the malaise is a dearth of public prayer, and what little goes on as public prayer is an embarrassment to the tradition. So poorly done, so poorly stated, what little there is; and in many congregations there is hardly any going on at all in the public gatherings, in the public services of the church. And I think that the more that this Fellowship begins to go out and to give emphasis to the public prayers and to work on those public prayers, and to give it the kind of due that is required, then we will be providing others with models, and we can be praying as we do that God will inspire others to see the importance and the necessity of public prayer.

Frankly, I don’t know what you call a service.... I’m real hesitant to call it “a worship service”... if you don’t pray. What makes it a worship service? If there’s only a minute or so, a quick prayer at the beginning and a quick prayer at the end...and of course one before the offering! *[Laughter]* What qualifies that?

Jesus said, “This house is a house of prayer” not because that was the only thing that went on there. Of course not. Sacrifices were offered, but that was the central thing. That was the characteristic thing. And we are God’s temple, the church, so it ought to be characteristic of our gatherings that we pray. I think between sung praise and prayer, if we say the average service is an hour long, then I think a good third to half of the service ought to be taken up with the six basic prayers of a solid Reformed worship service. About half the time given to praise and prayer...maybe a third to a half, somewhere in there...would represent what our theology really says: that we are indeed dependent upon the Holy Spirit, and we have indeed gathered to pray.

## **II. Preparing to pray.**

So let's then talk about preparing to pray. How do we go about praying?

### **Number one, public prayer builds on the private prayer and piety of the one who is leading in prayer.**

Somewhere in Whitefield's biography by Dallimore ...and I have scoured those two volumes...I cannot find it! Somewhere Dallimore draws the connection between Whitefield's private prayers and his public prayers. And I wanted a real pithy quote right here, and I can't find it! But that connection was drawn between the power of Whitefield's public prayers and the time he spend laboring privately in prayer. I don't think we can really expect to be otherwise, and I suspect as well that public prayer languishes because private prayer languishes.

We do not pray in public as we ought because we have become a generation of shallow, superficial, and worldly ministers. That's maybe uncharitable, and I'm not declaring it from Sinai; I'm just expressing what is my hunch. You cannot fake prayer. People will sense through you the reality of your own piety, and its depth will become evident.

A seminar on prayer can only go so far. Our prayers lack urgency, they lack passion, and they lack depth. And why is that? It is because we have not experienced God and His gospel with any depth, whereas I believe that if we truly have grasped the holiness of God and depravity of man, and the cost of redemption and the magnitude of God's grace to us in Christ, and if we grasp our weakness and our dependence upon God, then I think that we will see a revolution in our prayer lives. It took six months for me as a student at Trinity/Bristol praying the regular daily prayer of confession, and then the communion confession (you'll recognize some of the language: "thoughts, words, and deeds...evil done, good left undone...ignorance, weakness, our own deliberate fault...miserable offenders"...and so forth) that I came to understand the poverty of my own soul really for the first time, a realization that I trust will stay with me until I leave this world.

In our praise, we ought to be pondering the greatness of God; in our confession, pondering the depth of our own corruption; in our thanksgiving, again, giving thanks in light of the magnitude of the grace that we have received; in our petitions, pleading with God to give us the grace that we need to live lives that are pleasing to Him.

In I Peter 4:7, speaking about the tone of worship, Peter there connects our prayers with sobriety...there's a sobriety. There is a seriousness about all this, and the whole happy-clappy kind of tone I think is at odds, really, with what we are purporting to do when we gather in worship and when we draw near to God.

### **Secondly, public prayer is not private prayer.**

I think one of the rules of life that we all ought to own and practice is that it's important to distinguish things that are different.

You know, when I pray privately in my closet I can wear my pajamas, I can fumble around in my prayers. I can wander here, there, and everywhere, and that doesn't make any difference. And God is gracious and He receives those prayers...and my mind can wander and my thoughts can wander and my words can wander, and it doesn't make any difference.

But public prayer is not just me and God. It's a public prayer, so it is prayed really to two audiences, and that's not impious to say so. It is prayed to God, but it is prayed also in the hearing of the congregation. It is prayed with the intent that a congregation should hear and should be edified by what it hears. That's really the Apostle Paul's point, isn't it, in I Corinthians 14:15-19? You don't pray in an unknown tongue. Why? Because it's unfruitful. Unfruitful for who? The people listening! It's meant to edify the people that are listening. Public prayer prays to God, but not without recognition that there's an audience on earth as well that's hearing and is

meant to be edified by what it hears. So that means that we take care about our public prayers and we aim at edification.

There's a fine line here. We don't want to begin to preach in our prayers. We don't...they shouldn't have a sermonic tone, and we shouldn't lecture in our prayers, and we shouldn't give announcements in our prayers. We shouldn't be saying, "Lord, bless the Wednesday night prayer meeting that begins at 6 o'clock, and thank You for our guest, Mr. Jones, who's going to be there to speak to us on the subject of.... And for the coffee that's going to follow afterwards." [Laughter] You've heard it done, and you've heard that kind of thing being abused. But, no. We ought to be praying without lecturing, without sermonizing, without announcing, but praying prayers that are addressed to God, but overheard by the people. We pray with two audiences in mind.

And our language ought to be carefully chosen. You know, our generation has a bias. I think it's really the Baby Boomer generation that is to be blamed for this, but we have a bias for the spontaneous – the spontaneous equals the authentic. I think that's really the source of "just really" prayers. [Laughter]

In other words, it's that kind of painful earnestness. We don't just say "Thank You for the food." No. We have to say, "We really thank You for the food," and if we are especially spiritual, we "just really thank You for the food." It's just verbiage! It's just extra words, and they really are baggage that aren't edifying to anyone. And it's fine in private, but in public there ought to be greater care taken to the way that we go about praying, and that our prayers remain public in nature.

I don't think that we are issuing to our congregation an invitation into our private confessional: "Lord, I'm really struggling with lust and the woman sitting on the third pew in the low-cut, bare-shoulders..." We're not inviting people into our inner thought life and into the confessional. The concerns of public prayer are public! Private prayer, private! See things that differ...private prayer, private; group prayer, group; family prayer, family; public prayer, public.

I think you should also just be careful about naming names, like "Aunt Mabel's broken toe." Why does Aunt Mabel's broken toe get mentioned, but there's a whole bunch of other people with struggles, and they're not getting mentioned by name? You've got the "in" group and the "out" group...the "in" group whose needs are known, and the "out" group whose needs are not known, and they never get mentioned. I'm not saying don't ever mention names. Again, I'm not being legalistic about it. I'm just saying I think you need to be careful about it. Public prayer, public concerns; congregation-wide concerns, as well as beyond the congregation.

### **Third, public prayer, therefore, should be well-ordered.**

It's to be heard, it's to edify, and it's instructive. You should not trust whatever pops into your head. Spurgeon said about that that it's mere froth, so I think there ought to be a plan, an outline at least; or, again, our Reformed ancestors talked about conceived prayer and studied prayer. They wouldn't take a manuscript...they wouldn't read their prayers, but they would have at least the mental outline and perhaps a few notes for the direction that their prayer was going to take.

It should be theologically mature and accurate. Prayer is applied theology of the highest order. It's not a lecture, but it reflects what we believe about God and about us, and about the atonement, about Christ, redemption, sanctification, Christian living.

It should be filled with Scripture. The Bible is our prayer book, (more on that in a moment), and it should be rhetorically effective. We should use an economy of language. Our prayers should be well-stated, and they ought to be urgent and passionate, and so, rhetorically effective.

**Four, under preparing: The Bible to provide the language and the patterns of our prayers.**

There are three sources from which to learn from the Bible how to pray and the language to use.

**Number one, the prayers of the Bible, including the Psalms.** An example was used, I think, last night – I Chronicles 29:

“Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty; Thine is the dominion, O Lord, and Thou dost rule over all.”

I mean, that’s a great prayer of praise! And there’s Jeremiah 32, there’s Psalms 145-150, Psalms 95-100... there are any number of places, and that’s what I provided in the handout...just some examples of those things.

**How about the Bible’s teaching on prayer?** That also helps us in our public prayers. Before prayers of petition, I’ve been known to say, “Lord, we come to You asking that it might be given to us, seeking that we might find, knocking that it might be opened to us. We come at Your invitation asking, seeking, and knocking. We come because You’ve warned us that we have not because we ask not, and so we’re going to ask now, that we might have.” So the Bible’s teaching on prayer informs and shapes our prayers.

**And then, thirdly, the Bible’s teaching on God, man, sin, Christ, the atonement, sanctification, mission, and so forth and so on.** The whole Bible’s teaching and the language it uses to teach us then becomes a part of the language of our prayers, as we pray each of the six basic prayers.

**And then: Preparing to pray is a lifetime work.**

Every day as I read the Bible, I’m writing down prayer. I’m praying on the basis of what I’m reading. I think that’s a good discipline. I read, and then I pray what I think about the things that I’ve just read about God, about what I need to be doing, and about the church. Every chapter of the Bible has that about which we ought to be praying, and I typically write that stuff down, and eventually it works its way into my prayers. But I think that’s a lifetime of reading Scripture, pondering it, meditating upon it, drawing out substance for one’s prayers. And hopefully we would be growing, then, in our ability to do that.

**Basic prayers.**

**The six basic prayers.** Note that all six of these prayers are different. Though sometimes they might be combined in a general pastoral prayer, don’t confuse that which differs. Don’t do the same thing six times.

When I was an intern with Dr. Baird, he had several of us interns and several of us assistant ministers, and he would ...he liked to give us all a little something to do in the service. And so one of us would have the invocation and one of us might be given the pastoral prayer, one of us might have the prayer before the offering, and one of us might have the benediction. And finally, after several months of this, he finally said, “Look, we’re doing the same thing at four different times in the service. You all are doing all the same thing.” And so he sat us down and said, “Look, an invocation is not the pastoral prayer. The benediction, or the prayer before the offering, is not the invocation. These are six different categories of prayer.” [Again, I don’t want to be legalistic about it; there’s overlap, certainly.] But if you keep these categories straight, then your people will experience what they need to experience, which is the full diet of prayer: invocation, confession, thanksgiving, intercessions, the prayer of illumination, and the benediction.

## **I. Invocation.**

The invocation...invocation, or call to worship, or prayer of praise. I've given some Scriptural examples on pages 1-4.

This is not thanksgiving. This is meditation upon the attributes and works of God. We "enter into His courts with praise," Psalm 100 says, and again there are a number of different examples that I've given to you that provide the substance for prayer. For example, Jeremiah 32, on page 2:

"Behold," [Jeremiah prays,] "Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and Thine outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for Thee. The Lord of hosts is Your name, great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to the ways of the sons of men..."

and so forth and so on. That's a great prayer. I don't think you want to do it word for word, but you can glean from that. Jeremiah speaks here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with prophetic insight into the nature of God. I think you would want to learn from that.

I would include in the invocation statements of our yearning for and desire for God. I think that is a part of what we do when we call upon Him: We are like the deer that pants for the water brook; We desire His lovingkindness which is better than life; We desire fellowship with Him, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; It is His nearness that is our good; We find in Him the desires of our heart (Psalm 84, Psalm 63, Psalm 42 – the deer panting for the water brook); we are thirsting for the living God; we wish to drink from the river of His delight and partake of the fullness of His house; we want to feed upon the bread of life; we want to drink the living water. So we express in that invocation a desire for it; that's why it is not a dry academic exercise.

Again, we're not just reciting attributes. We've moved from whatever we are recalling of the attributes and works of God; we then are moving from that into our longing and desire for the presence of God. So we begin our services with an invocation, call to worship, prayer of praise.

**II. Confession.** Then, confession and assurance of pardon (pages 6-7 of your handout). You have wonderful prayers of confession in Psalm 51, Psalm 32, Daniel 9, Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9...and I think it helps.

You know, sameness and routine in prayer is deadly, and the problem is that we fall into these patterns, and so I think it's helpful again to start collecting themes. For example, as you confess your sins, whether it's a separate confession or part of the pastoral prayer, you might dwell on our *unworthiness*. Lots of statements in the Bible about unworthiness. We're unworthy to touch the hem of His garment; we're unworthy to loosen the strap of His sandal; we have sinned against heaven and in His sight; we are not worthy to be called His sons; we are the very least of all the saints; we are the chief of sinners...there's a lot of "worm theology" in the Bible! [Laughter] The old hymn book I had edited it out ... "such a worm as I"...but you know it's in there! God says to Israel in Isaiah, "Thou Israel," or "Jacob, thou worm!" There's plenty of it, and it's good for the soul. So you might recall unworthiness.

You might pray the confessional part on the *basis of the two commandments*: We have not loved You with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are continually in violation of both of these commandments.

You might pray the prayer of the confession through the *Ten Commandments*. We have placed other gods before us. There are idols in our hearts. We have misused and abused Your name. We have desecrated Your Sabbath. We have murdered in our hearts, and committed adultery in our hearts, and we have cheated others of that which is theirs and taken that which

does not belong to us, and we have bent and warped Your truth, and we have coveted that which does not belong to us. So you might introduce a prayer of confession that way.

You know the hymn, *We Have Not Loved You as We Ought*. That makes a great confession. We have not known You as we ought. We have not loved You, we have not served You, we have not honored You, we have not obeyed You – not as we ought. We have fallen short of Your glory. We have offended You. We have grieved Your Holy Spirit.

You can talk about the *path*. We have strayed from Your path; we have departed from Your ways. We have turned from Your truth.

You can talk about the *heart*. You can talk about the sins of the saints. This is one of my favorite things to pray in the pastoral prayer, confessing as a congregation. And I'm always grateful when there are unbelievers there to hear it, to hear that we are guilty of the sins of the saints: We are self-righteous; we are hypocrites; we have judged others wrongly; we have strained gnats and swallowed camels; we are whitewashed tombs, clean on the outside and full of corruption on the inside; we have condemned the specks in the eyes of others, and we have condoned the planks that are in our own. So there's a lot of variety that you can work in there about the ways in which we have fallen short of the glory of God, broken His commandments and laws, and failed to carry out His will.

But then, transition, then in this prayer of confession and assurance of pardon to *the gospel as a prayer*. We give thanks that Christ died, the just for the unjust; that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. He came to save sinners. He came to save His people from their sins. Those are all Scriptural expressions. He bore our sins in His body. Though He knew no sin, He became sin that we might receive God's righteousness in Him. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, though He despised its shame. He gave His life as a ransom for ours. Or, the words of institution: His body was broken; His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

Then you give thanks, and then you *give thanks for the benefits*: We rejoice, O Lord, that having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. We give thanks that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We give thanks that You have promised that if we confess our sins (and we have) that You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness, and that in Christ Jesus you have removed our iniquities as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103). You have tread our iniquities underfoot. You have buried them in the depths of the sea.

There's just such rich biblical language, and it's so much more authoritative and comforting than for us to just say, "Thank You that You forgive us for all our sins," in that kind of routine, rote, and unbiblical language. With just a little effort, we can be plowing the Scriptures for the language that the saints will recognize.

And somebody says, "Well, we have all these young Christians. They don't recognize any of it." [Yeah, and they never will!] There is an upwards spiral in Reformed worship. You see, the word is being read, so we're getting familiar with it. The word is being preached, so we're getting familiar with it. The word is being sung in our classic hymnody, in our metrical psalmody, so we're getting familiar with it. And, it's being prayed in the pastor's prayer, so we are growing and learning in accumulative impact in everything from call to worship to benediction being expressed in biblical language.

It is dynamic – at least, I think it is – again, if you take seriously the Apostle's promise that faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, they're going to be growing in faith. They're going to be fed by the pure milk of the word as it's being read, preached on, prayed, and administered in the sacraments. So, prayer of confession of sin, assurance of pardon.

### **III. Thanksgiving.**

We've really already touched on it, but particularly before the collection I think is a good time for a more extended prayer of thanksgiving for all things spiritual and material.

So you might use the language of Ephesians 3: "We give thanks that You have done..." and has He not done "exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we could ask or think?" or that "He has supplied all of our needs, according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus," and that "He who withheld not His only Son, but delivered Him up for us all, He has with him freely given us all things," and "that in Christ we have been made complete" and "in Christ we have received everything pertaining to life and godliness," and that "in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Right? So we give thanks, then, for all benefits material and spiritual.

### **IV. Then, intercessions and petitions.**

Pages 9-10 of your handout give you the outline that the Reformers gleaned from Scripture and from their study of the church fathers. The five-fold petitions are for civil authorities, Christian ministry and missions, salvation of the lost, sanctification of the saints, and prayers for the afflicted. Essentially what we are doing is claiming the promises of God and praying the commandments of God. The commandments become our petitions.

#### **Civil authority.**

So, you would pray for the civil authorities I Timothy 2:1-2. We need to be praying for our nation. Pray for the peace of Babylon! [*Laughter*] All right, secondly, Christian ministry and missions. The pastoral epistles are full of the stuff that we ought to be praying. You ought to be praying for the church catholic (small "c") that it would give attention to the public reading of God's word, that it would preach the word in season and out of season, that it would resist the temptation to abandon sound doctrine and instead tickle ears. (You're familiar with that, right?)

#### **The church.**

That the church would be the pillar of the truth, so there are many fine, meaningful aspirations for the church that Paul states to Timothy and to Titus. Just glean those and pray for those for the church – your local church, the regional church, the PCA, the church universal. Pray for the church: it's ministries, its ministers (that they would be bold, that they would be courageous, that they would stick to Scripture, that they would fulfill their callings); that the church would be the church: that it would resist temptation to try to be something other than the church; that it would feed the sheep rather than entertain goats, as Mr. Still would say.

#### **Then, the salvation of the lost.**

Pray for all men, in particular for the salvation of the lost, that the gospel would be preached, that the gospel would be known, that God would be pleased to send revival and to open the hearts of the unbelieving – praying with the confidence that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord; praying in the confidence that the knowledge of the glory of God will indeed cover the earth as the waters cover the seas, and the day will come (as Hebrews says, quoting Jeremiah) when no man need say to his neighbor, "Know the Lord, for each shall know Him, from the least to the greatest."

When you pray, pray the promises that the world will be won to Christ. No, I'm not making a millennial statement there, but... [*Laughter*]... however, in whatever scope you conceive of the world, whether it's a tiny little world [*laughter*] for all you pessimistic amil's and premil's, or if it's a great big world [*laughter*] for the optimistic amil's and postmil's, pray for the salvation of the lost.

And then, pray for **the sanctification of the saints**.

I think this is as neglected as anything that I know of, and it just baffles me. But it really shouldn't baffle me, I guess. I feel like I have neglected this whole category myself for years. Page 10, you see I have listed there some examples of the apostles' prayers, and notice: when the apostles pray, what do they pray? These prayers are almost entirely taken up with the sanctification of the saints – Ephesians 1; Colossians 1; Philippians 1 – it is for that that they pray. Here are the kinds of things I think you ought to pray for.

How about the Beatitudes? Shouldn't you be praying for your people that they would be poor in spirit, that they would be meek and merciful, and mourn their sins? And that they would be hungry and thirsting after righteousness, and that they would be pure in heart, and that they would be peacemakers, and that they would have joy even in affliction and persecution?

How about the whole Sermon on the Mount? Why would we not pray regularly the contents of the Sermon on the Mount? Aren't those Jesus' aspirations for us, and the things to which He connects His blessing? Aren't those the things that we want to become? Don't we want our hearts rid of murderous hate and adulterous lust? And don't we want to keep and teach the least of the commandments, and don't we want to turn the other cheek and walk the extra mile, and give the coat off our back, and love our neighbors and love our enemies? And be children of our Father who is in heaven? And don't we want to practice righteousness privately, so as to please our Father and not stand on street corners when we pray? And not sound the trumpet when we give? And not put on gloomy faces...? I mean, there is so much content for prayer you've got to break the sermon up into little tiny bite-sized pieces.

Why not pray Ephesians 4 and 5? It's loaded! No unwholesome words proceeding out of our mouths, only words that are good for edification. Lord, help us to control our tongues! No silly talk, no coarse jesting! So move in our hearts that we would be kind to one another and tender-hearted, forgiving each other as You in Christ have forgiven us. How about the whole list of "one anothers"? Love one another, be kind to one another, pray for one another, bear one another's burdens. If you pray for the church the "one anothers" you hardly can improve upon that.

I think if you'll look at...certainly the New Testament with fresh eyes, you'll see every chapter has the subject matter for prayer. You don't want to do it in a wooden way. This could be done poorly and badly, and in a way that makes prayer Scripture-reading. You don't want to do that, but you want to glean from the commands and aspirations and exhortations of the New Testament the subject matter for our prayers for the sanctification of the people of God. And it's there, I would say, for virtually every prayer.

How about Romans 12:1? That we would present our bodies as living sacrifices; that we would not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds. These are key aspirations for us, and it certainly is the apostolic focus in the prayers that we have in the New Testament itself.

### **The afflicted.**

And then, yes, we do pray for the afflicted (James 5) – those who are sick, those whose bodies are broken. And I often draw from the language of Psalm 130. There are those who come to our service who are in the depths. "Out of the depths, O Lord, I cry to Thee." I think there's a lot of services that see the gathering as a celebration and ignore this whole dimension of Christian experience – the lament of those who have come and are discouraged or depressed, who are in the depths, who are in the miry clay. They ought to hear our voice on their behalf.

And when you pray for the afflicted...how about the emotionally afflicted? How about the discouraged and the despondent? Those who are in the depths. Dr. Olds says,

“The restoration of the prayer of intercession to the ordinary service of the Lord’s Day was one of the most valuable liturgical reforms of the sixteenth century. Do not neglect that which has come to us at such great cost.”

These are prayers of intercession.

## **V. Illumination.**

Fifthly, the prayer of illumination, again, arises out of our sense of dependence upon the Holy Spirit. What an exclamation point to the principle of *sola gratia*! We cannot even understand the reading and the proclamation of the gospel unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes! Psalm 119 is full of that prayer – verse after verse after verse after verse prays that God will give understanding, that God will open the eyes so that wondrous things might be beheld from God’s Law. That’s pages 10-11.

## **VI. Benediction.**

And the benediction. Also, the Reformers restored this from patristic practice. There is a debate as to whether or not the benediction is a pronouncement or a prayer, so I will publicly thank Dr. Kelley for asking us to bow our heads as he prayed! But I’m not going to reveal my bias on the issue! [Laughter]

There is the Aaronic...Old Testament.... I like to open the day with the Apostolic Benediction: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship...etc.” and close the day with the Aaronic from the Old Testament: “The Lord bless you and keep you....”

## **III. SUMMARY...Conclusion.**

**Are you going to pray six times in each public worship service, either distinctive prayers or several of them combined in a pastoral prayer?**

Here’s the impact that I think you will make. Your congregation will come to understand their personal, as well as the church’s, dependence upon the Holy Spirit. They will experience repentance and forgiveness, and yearnings for holiness and Christlikeness. They will experience through your prayers thanksgiving and joy in the reality of God’s gifts to us in Christ, and they will learn to draw near to God with reverence and awe (Hebrews 12:28).

But you and I need to become better men, with deeper piety and a greater experiential awareness of God, of His being and attributes, of the gospel, of our own depravity, of the magnitude of God’s grace to us in Christ Jesus, and of our earnest seeking after and desire for holiness and Christlikeness. And for us to become better men with a deeper experiential awareness of the things of God is going to require study and preparation, and work, and closet prayer, that we might lead others to the throne of grace.

Let us pray.

*Our Father in heaven, we pray that we might become more adept at leading Your people in prayer, and that we would be faithful to the full scope of prayer that we find in Your word. And, oh, that we would pray with urgency, and that we would pray with passion, and that we would pray, even as Jesus taught us to pray, and as Your whole word teaches us to pray! And we pray for depth in our prayers, and substance in our prayers, and pray that our prayers would be edifying and would bear fruit in the lives of our people. Hear our prayer, O Lord, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

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