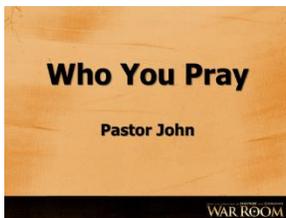


## **Who You Pray**

January 22, 2017

KEY PASSAGE: MATTHEW 6:5-8 (CEV)

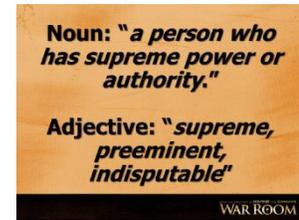
*<sup>5</sup> When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward. <sup>6</sup> When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you. <sup>7</sup> When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. <sup>8</sup> Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.*



We began our prayer series two weeks ago by studying “when you pray” and then transitioned last next week into “where you pray”. Over the course of the last two weeks we have looked at the necessity of establishing a quiet, private time and space to connect to God every day. We also looked at the different types of prayers we offer to God as well as looking at how God must be the priority or focus of our prayers. This week we will spend some time studying ‘who you pray’. This Sunday we will look at the focus of our prayers: God. Today we will wrestle with three main aspects of who we pray to: the God who is sovereign, the God who responds, and the God who blesses. Let us pray.

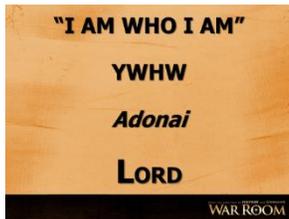
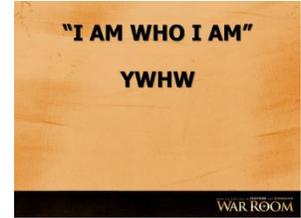


First, we pray to a God who is sovereign. When used as a noun, dictionary.com defines 'sovereign' as "*a person who has supreme power or authority*". As an adjective, the definition becomes, "*supreme; preeminent; indisputable*". When we combine these two definitions, we get a pretty good working definition of what it means to say that our God is sovereign. We believe in a God who is in total control.

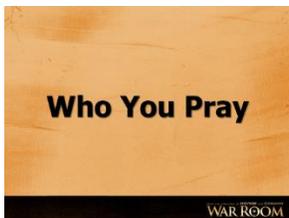


In the Old Testament, God calls Moses to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses goes up the mountain and meets God at the burning bush and God says to Moses in Exodus 3, verse ten, "*I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.*" But remember, Moses had fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian and has been living in Midian with his father-in-law, Jethro. Moses has been in Midian for forty years. He hears God's command but is unsure if the Israelite people will listen to this man who suddenly appears and says God has sent him to free them from slavery. So Moses asks God what he should say when the people ask who sent him. In essence, Moses is asking for God's name. God responds by saying to tell the Israelites that "I AM WHO I AM" has sent Moses. In these words, God tells Moses that He is the living, eternal, ever-present, self-existent, holy, unchanging One. God is sovereign.

For the Israelites, "I am" would come to be equivalent to "YHWH", God's proper name in the Hebrew language. We pronounce the name "Yahweh" in English. For the people of God in the Old Testament, the proper name of God was so holy that they would not ever speak the word, out of fear of inadvertently using it as a curse. When the priests would read the scriptures, they would say the



word *'Adonai'* whenever they came to the word YHWH. In our Bibles, God's proper name is commonly translated to LORD, all in capital letters, which comes from the meaning of the Hebrew word *Adonai*. Again, this personal name of God is so holy that many Jews to this day will not speak it out loud or even write it on paper. This is why, when Jesus used the phrase "I Am" in the New Testament, He was accused by the religious leaders of blasphemy. But as God incarnate, Jesus was also saying he was sovereign over all. In his resurrection we see that this claim is indeed true.



Living in a world full of idolatry, the people of the Old Testament worked to make certain no mistake could be made regarding the identity of the one, true, living God. In our world today, which is still full of idol worship and too many idle hearts, we too need to be aware of the one, true, living God. In the words, "I AM WHO I AM", there is the implication that God does not change. This is part of the supreme, preeminent, indisputable sovereignty of God. God is who God is. In Isaiah 40:28 we read, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow

weary; his understanding is unsearchable.” God is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. God is everlasting. Our God is sovereign yesterday, today, tomorrow, and forevermore.

When we pray, we need to pray from this perspective. When we pray, part of our understanding needs to rest on the belief that God is sovereign, that God is in total control. Our prayers need to be ‘couched’ in and rooted upon this understanding. It is also in this understanding that we find comfort and strength, knowing that God alone is in control, that God is sovereign over all things.



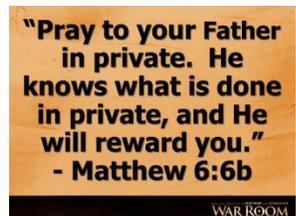
When we pray, we pray to a God who responds. God hears our prayers and responds to our prayers. Our key verse for today reinforces this idea. When we come to God and seek

God’s guidance and direction in our lives, when we make God our focus and our priority for how we live, then God will respond to our prayers. Verse six from

today speaks of this: *“Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you.”* But

we must be careful with that *reward* word. In our minds ‘reward’ can mean something different than what it really

means in this passage. We think reward means getting what we want or somehow gaining possessions or power or prestige because we pray. To help us understand what it means to find ‘reward’, here is a different translation of this passage. The Message translation reads this way: *“Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before*



*God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace."* Let me repeat that last line again: *"The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace."* This is our reward for coming to God with our honest, humble, God-seeking prayers. We will connect to God in a new, deeper way. We will begin to sense God and His grace working in our lives. We will be truly rewarded when we pray to our sovereign God who responds to our prayers faithfully.

**"The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace."  
- Matthew 6:6b**

WAR ROOM

**We pray to a God:**

- 1) Who is sovereign.
- 2) Who responds.
- 3) Who blesses.

WAR ROOM

We will be rewarded because, when we pray, we pray to a God who blesses. We pray to a God who loves to give His children good gifts. In Matthew 7, verses 7 through 11, hear Jesus' words about how God loves to give us good gifts:

*<sup>7</sup>Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>8</sup>Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And the door will be opened for everyone who knocks. <sup>9</sup>Would any of you give your hungry child a stone, if the child asked for some bread? <sup>10</sup>Would you give your child a snake if the child asked for a fish? <sup>11</sup>As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give good things to people who ask.*

God wants to bless us with His presence in our lives. God wants to bless us with guidance for our daily lives. God wants to bless us with contentment in this life and with reassurance concerning the life to come. God wants to bless us with strength and courage and faith to face the challenges and temptations that this world can bring. And when we succumb to the challenges or temptations, God wants to bless us with his mercy and grace and forgiveness so that we can live daily as a witness to His love in our lives and in our world. Our sovereign God responds to our prayers with blessings.



*A heart-broken little girl began to kneel and pour out her heart to God at the altar in her local church. She did not know what to say. As she wept speechless, she began to remember what her Father had told her, "God knows your needs even before you pray, and he can answer when you don't even know for what to ask." So she began to say her alphabet. A concerned adult from that church knelt beside her and heard her sobbing and saying her ABC's and inquired what exactly she was trying to do. The little girl told this caring adult, "I'm praying to God from my heart." But the adult answered, "It sounds to me more like you're are saying the alphabet!"*

*"Yes," she said, "But God knows more about what I need than I do, and he can take all these letters and arrange them in just the right way to hear and answer my prayers!"*

God not only responds to our prayers and wants to bless us, but, even more than this, God also understands just what we need. God will hear and answer our prayers in the ways that will be best for us. Like this illustration of the little girl's faith, we too can trust in God's responses to our prayers. It is a powerful testimony to a child's strong faith in God's love and care. It is an example we would do well to follow.

God hears and answers prayer all of the time. In this scene from The War Room, where we see the closing prayer scene, Miss Clara expresses her gratitude for the prayers that God has heard and has answered. [Play video.]



There is much truth in Miss Clara's prayer. God is faithful and blesses us even when we do not deserve it. He is a good and mighty and powerful God who is faithful to us. Our world is very much in need of prayer. Her prayer for God to raise up a generation of prayer warriors resonates deeply with me. It is my prayer for our church. It is my prayer for our nation. It is my prayer for each of you.

God is sovereign. God is in control. God is faithful. God wants to bless us. God responds to our prayers. And not just in the movies. This past week I received a text from one of our members. It is edited a little bit for their privacy, but I would like to share the heart of the text with you now.

*I really enjoyed the movie on January 1. But I hadn't given much thought about it until yesterday when I heard your sermon... I got a copy of the Upper Room yesterday. Then I went to the dollar store and bought a few things. I cleaned out the front closet this morning when everyone was gone and went in there and read and prayed. My goal was 10 minutes. I think I was there 15 to 20. I feel a sense of peace I haven't felt in a long time... And if you have time could you pray for me this week that I continue to spend time with God each day?*

God is faithful. God wants to bless us. God responds to our prayers. Thank you Lord Jesus! Thank you God. Let us pray.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) How does knowing that God is sovereign (or in control) affect your prayers? How does it affect the way you live your life day to day?
- 2) What are the greatest 'rewards' that you have received when God has responded to your prayers?
- 3) If you were to be more consistent and honest and humble in your prayer life, where or how would you hope that God would bless you?
- 4) Who do you need God to be most right now in your life: sovereign, responding, or blessing? Pray for God to be what you need this week.

“Closing Prayer Scene” Summary:

Miss Clara opens by thanking God because He has ‘done it again Lord’. She acknowledges that her good, mighty, powerful God has been faithful again – even when she did not deserve it. Miss Clara asks God to send her another one, another Elizabeth to pour into. She extends her prayer to ask God to raise up a generation of prayer warriors. The scenes shift to family praying together, to a farmer reading the Bible on his tractor, a group of students gathering for prayer at their school, to a prayer gathering at a church... She prays that all will proclaim salvation in the name of Jesus Christ, that all will worship the Lord with their whole hearts, that all will come to proclaim Jesus the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It ends with the words, “Lord, raise them up”.