

“AN END AND A BEGINNING.”
First Christians Reformed Church, Lynden
January 1, 2017

Every beginning and every ending should be with prayer. Our first waking thought should be of God and His will, His Word, His power and grace for the day. Our last waking thought should be of God and His provision and protect, blessings and benefits, grace and forgiveness.

It has been the custom in the CRC to end each year and begin each year with special worship services. We are combining those two services into one this morning. You will notice that your service has two parts, as we look back and as we look ahead.

In every time of need we should turn our hearts to God. He is our fortress, our refuge and strength. The strength of any Christian and the strength of any church is measured by her prayer. I call us to prayer and I urge us to be earnest and persistent and faithful in prayer this new year.

But let's face it, let's be honest, prayer is hard. If I were to ask you how is your prayer life, I think most of you would say something like “not as good as it could be or should be.” Most of us feel like we fall short, and don't pray as much or as seriously as we should.

Prayer is hard. Life is busy and full of distractions. With the addition of smart phones, social media, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, messaging and texting, we are becoming more connected with the world and more distracted and disconnected from God.

We pour out our hearts and emotions on social media platforms and blogs but have little to say to God.

A friend of mine in OKC announced this past week that as of midnight last night he was going off Facebook for good. He said he had lived most of his life without it and he was sure his life would not end if he gave it up. He realized that while there is good on the computer, it was distracting him and sidetracking him from better and more important things, like more serious reading and time with God in Scripture and prayer.

We are making a statement this morning, a very important statement. This service is a declaration of our desperate dependence on God.

What would happen if the sun ceased to shine? Seriously, if the sun went dark what would happen? In eight minutes the earth would go dark and cold.

The moon and other planets would disappear from view since they reflect the sun's light. The temperature on earth would fall to less than 0 degrees in a week and -100 degrees within a year. Photosynthesis would cease so all plant life would begin to die and so would everything that depends on plants for food.

In spite of all our technological advances the sun is absolutely crucial to our existence and we are completely dependent on it in the physical realm.

Prayer is our way of saying we recognize that our lives are completely dependent on God and completely connected to God. God actively participates in every aspect of our existence. Without God we would soon cease to exist.

Our starting this year with a prayer service is our way of acknowledging apart from Him we can accomplish nothing. We are saying we need help. We are saying that we have been debtors to His grace all of last year and this coming year is going to be no different.

Jesus says, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father" (John 14:13).

God the creator has created us creatures to be dependent on Him, so that He will be glorified in our lives through our dependence on Him. We can be bold in prayer because God delights to glorify Himself by answering our prayers. He will get the glory and we will get the benefit. It's a win/win.

But prayer is hard. What is it that makes our prayer lives weak or lukewarm? It's a sense that we have what we need or we are good to go or oh, well, this is as good as it gets. The essence of prayerlessness is spiritual apathy or self-satisfaction. Is God getting the leftovers of our time and energy? What should get our best, home and job or God?

Can you imagine a marriage that consisted only of texting and Facebook messages? Marriage depends on deeper communication than that. And our souls depend on deeper communication with God.

God has in His grace given us free access to Him through Christ, how do we use it and what do we ask? How earnest and frequent and bold are our prayers? Do we seek great things from God?

Our first prayer should be asking God for greater earnestness and frequency and boldness in prayer, for more of His divine power at work in us to give us more joy in worship, more sorrow over sin, more desire for holiness, more evidence of Christ-likeness, more fruit of the Spirit, more love for God and for others.

Do we ever pray like Paul?

Colossians 1:9-11 We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with *joy*.

God loves giving good things to His children, and this is asking for the very best things. Pray, ask, seek, knock this year.

Do this for the sake of your joy, to have joy and peace in the New Year.

John 16:23-24 In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So we come this morning *to thank God* for His grace and *to ask for more grace*.

In a little while there will be an opportunity for you to offer silent prayers of thanksgiving for God's grace and goodness this past year, and then later to offer petitions for 2017.