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SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

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TITLE: The Secret to Effective Prayer Pt. 2

Is it wrong to pray for our wants? No, not necessarily, but if it is all we pray for – that’s a problem. If we lie about our motives, that’s wrong. At times in my life, I’ve prayed with wrong motives. I’ve prayed like this; “God, I pray that you will bless me financially. Just bless me. I’ll do so much for your Kingdom.” But in my heart, I was desiring a new car, a new TV, and trips. In other words, my motives were wrong. I lied in my heart. My prayer was ineffective.

Instead, we need to pray in all things, “Not my will, but your will.” That’s how Jesus prayed. Praying this way shows humility, but also a trust in God, and a submissiveness to His will for your life. Make the request to God for your desire, but sincerely have the posture of “but if this isn’t your will, I rest in your decision, because you are good.” That’s a prayer of a person rooted in Christ.

The Apostle Paul said this, “[And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him](#)” (1 John 5:14-15, ESV).

Imagine what would happen as a result of our prayers sounding like this: “Father, I pray for our church. I pray that our people will love you more. I pray they will love your Word more. I pray that you will open the hearts of the lost around me; that they will cry out to you as Lord and Savior. Father, help me go out in boldness to the lost, and never be ashamed of the Gospel.” These are prayers according to God’s will and prayers that belong to a person rooted in Christ.

The next ingredient of effective prayer is to **Pray with faith.**

[“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:24](#)

Has anyone here prayed and didn’t believe it wouldn’t actually come true? I have. I have doubted in my prayer. Now, I know with certainty that God can do all things - there’s no doubt about it. And yet, we put God in a human box. We know we should pray for the broken car. We know we should pray for the money for the electrical bill. We know we should be praying for healing of a broken relationship, yet when we pray, we pray with a bit of doubt. I believe that God wants to do amazing things to continue to show you He is faithful and in control. He wants to do the supernatural in you and through you, but this takes faith. And this faith is based on a reasonable and verified trust in God.

Throughout history, as recorded in God's Word and in the written record of the church for 2000 years, God has been, and will continue to be, faithful to His people by means of faithful prayer.

Theologian Wayne Grudem said this, "Biblical faith is never a kind of wishful thinking or vague hope that doesn't have any secure foundation on which to rest. It is rather trust in a person, God himself, based on the fact that we take him at his word and believe what he has said. This trust or dependence on God, when it also has an element of assurance or confidence, is genuine biblical faith."

When we trust God, we pray and then we wait for His action. This doesn't mean we don't move as well, but we don't manipulate the situation. We do the responsible things in our daily lives, and we trust Him to act on our behalf. You see, we pray with faith.

The next ingredient for effective prayer is a hard one, because we are to **Pray with a clean heart.**

I'm not sure, but I think this may be one of the ingredients that most people leave out of their daily prayer. In fact, they may not pray this way weekly, monthly, yearly, or forever. Have you ever paused to think about who it is we are talking to in prayer? Think about it. We get the privilege of talking with the God who created the Universe. We are talking with God, who would send His very Son into the Universe to die for our sins. We who were sinners - dead in our sins and enemies of God - He would give us keys to the Kingdom. Why would He do this? Because He loves His Creation. This is the God we get to talk to in prayer, but just because He is gracious, does not mean that we cannot offend Him still. Just because we are forgiven, doesn't mean we cannot hinder the relationship.

We know, according to Psalm 103, our sins are as far away as the East is from the West. That is true from the moment of Salvation. And yet when we sin, we still offend a holy God. My wife may love me, which she surely does. My wife respects me. Our relationship and our marriage is beyond secure. But you better believe it, if I hurt her by something I say or do, I need to pause, and come back, and confess my sin, before I go in for a kiss. If you offended someone at work or at church, you know you would have to apologize before moving forward with anything else. You may try to ignore it. You may try to pretend like nothing happened, or it wasn't a big deal. But you and I know that there will be a barrier in the relationship, until that problem is reconciled.

This is why Proverbs 28:13 (NIV) says, "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

Psalm 66:18 (ESV) says, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." David is saying, if I had kept sin in my heart, as a result of my disobedience, the Lord wouldn't have been inclined to answer my prayer. In other words, even for the follower of Christ, our sin creates a disruption in the relationship with God. It doesn't break the relationship with God, but it does create a rift in the relationship.

DISCUSSION:

N: So this is not a religion; this is a relationship. That's something we talk about all the time here at Back to the Bible. So let's talk with Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney about that. Cara, how has confession impacted your relationship with God?

C: Well, I'm a verbal processor. So hearing myself talk to Him really reveals my shortcomings. And I love that, because it means God's hearing me - the Holy Spirit's in my life - but it also makes me want to throw up, because I'm no prize. And He loves me despite that. So I think it has a lot to do with it - everything. I mean, I can't - unless I confess what I'm doing wrong - I can't change.

N: Confession is so important. And again, I think if we just keep going back to those analogies of our own personal relationships - how our actions, our words, can really hurt and create a barrier between each other. And so we know, practically speaking, that unless we come and apologize, the problem's still there. And so, though God is our Heavenly Father, and He has forgiven us, we're not being re-forgiven. We're just restoring that relationship. Arnie, the Bible tells us to pray with faith. Some people might think, "The reason I'm praying is because I'm in an uncertain situation. So how do I pray with faith?" And I'm just curious, have you ever felt that way?

A: I think it helps to have the faith of a child. And so if you pray with faith, it's the simplest thing, because it's already been answered. So to me, don't make it over-complicated. It's just, pray with faith, because you believe in God, you believe in Jesus; so it's already been answered. I've come to accept that. So whenever there's bad news, or this, or that, it's, "Well, God's answered that prayer already". And I think that helps.

N: Yeah. And I think that's such a key difference between that whole religion and relationship. A lot of people pray because it's a checkoff. It's a, "Hey, I better cover my butt. So I'm going to pray, or pray this prayer, or do this thing." And again, that's religion. It's about what you can do. It's about what you can do to save yourself, or to keep saving yourself. But when we talk about relationship - that experience of grace that we experience from God - we pray because it's a privilege, and we get to pray with confidence that what God says is best, and we can trust Him, whether it's Yes, No, or Wait.

Can you imagine if I came home and yelled at my wife? What if I insulted her with my words and my behavior, and then 30 minutes later, came up to her and tried to give her a kiss? She'd be insulted. She'd withdraw from me. If she had any sense, she'd probably give me a little smack! Can you imagine how you would react, if your spouse, or best friend, or family member manipulated you, and lied to you, but then turned around, and asked you to watch a movie, or asked you for a favor? You'd be insulted. You'd wonder what's wrong with this person.

Why would God be any different? When we sin against God, we need to confess our sins to God. We need to admit what we did was wrong, and say "I'm sorry God. I've offended You. I was wrong." This is what would be needed when you hurt someone in your life, before the relationship could be restored. You need to confess, and come back to the relationship with a

clean heart. The Apostle John said, “[If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness](#)” (1 John 1:9, ESV).

When we confess, we need to confess out of the sincere repentance in our heart. We must confess out of a sincere grief that we have sinned against God, our Heavenly Father. We can’t confess, simply to try to get out of a consequence, or to get what we want.

For those of us with kids or grandkids, or any of us who have watched a child, you know what I’m talking about. It’s about time for cookies, but out of nowhere, sweet and innocent John or Abby pushes another kid out of the way, to receive their cookie first. And what do you say to them? “It saddens me you were so mean to your friend. Now you don’t get a cookie.” And what do they say? “I’m sorry, Mom!” “I’m sorry, Dad!” “I’m sorry, Teacher!” “I didn’t mean to be so mean.” But you know what’s going on, don’t you? What are they really saying? “I’m not sorry for what I did, but I do really want that cookie.”

Ok, maybe that’s a little bit distant for you, so let me bring this a little bit closer to home. Ever been in a fight with your spouse, kids, or someone else on your way to church? You have a whale of a fight, but as you get ready to pull into the parking lot, you say, “We can’t be fighting in church. I’m sorry. Let’s move on.” I know you’ve done it, because I’ve done this. Why? Well, I’m really not sorry for the fight or issue. I’m actually simply trying to make *me* look good at church. I want to make sure we look good, and like our marriage is perfect. But that’s not the kind of confession we need. We need confession that’s sincere. This is exactly what we need to do with God: Come to Him with a clean heart, through sincere, heartfelt confession.

And the last ingredient for effective prayer is to **Pray with thanksgiving**.

Philippians 4:6-7 has become one of our favorite verses. [Philippians 4:6](#) says, “[do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.](#)”

As the people of God, we don’t need to worry about anything, but instead pray about everything with thanksgiving. At the end of the day, when we are focused on God, His faithfulness, and His promises, we have no reason to complain. We have no reason to worry. God, in reasons only known to Him, chose us before the foundation of the world. That’s what it says in Ephesians 1. He had reached out from eternity and said, “you will be my child.” The fact that we have our greatest need met – that is peace with God – we have very little to worry about.

When we survey our lives, though there are hard times, painful times, confusing times, I believe that we will see - God has been faithful and graceful beyond measure to us. But I do recognize that we have significant pains here on Earth. We have financial issues, relationship blunders, health scares, addictions, and so much more. Those are real. Those are legitimate pains. And I tell you, God cares.

Listen to what Psalm 56:8 (NASB) says, “[You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?](#)” God truly cares about your pain and he keeps track of our hurts.

Yet on the other hand, we know that as James said, our lives are like vapor. We are here for just a brief moment in the scope of time. So we need to remember, our suffering is short. But in the end, we need to remember that we will rule with Christ forever. When we reign, there will be no more pain, no more sickness, no more fear. It will be perfect. That helps me approach the throne of grace with thanksgiving. We look forward to a future that's perfect, and in perfect communion with God forever. That's a reason to be thankful.

To have effective prayer, these 6 ingredients are essential. You must **begin with being God's child**. If you've never put your faith and trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, do not wait. Christ is coming back at any time. You could die any time. And if you die without Christ, it will be Hell. It will be separation from God forever. And don't think, just because you've gone to church your whole life, that makes you a Christian. Don't think, just because you know who Jesus is, and what He did on the cross, that makes you a Christian. Even the demons know these truths and they shudder. If you've never repented from your sin, and turned to Jesus as your Lord and Savior, do so today. Simply confess to Him you are a sinner, and you need His gift of salvation. Believe – put your whole trust in his death, burial, and resurrection. When you do this, your life will be changed, and your soul will be saved.

Once you are His child, then you can begin to have effective prayer, by praying with humility, praying according to His will, praying in faith, praying with a clean heart, and then praying with thanksgiving.

If you desire to be a fully devoted Christ follower – one who is rooted in Christ - having an effective prayer life is one characteristic you cannot live without.

N: You cannot have a message about prayer without ending in prayer. And so that's what we're going to do right now. I'm going to bring in Arnie and Cara, and we're just going to pray. We get prayer requests from many of you, and let's just be honest. There's a lot going on in the world today. So we just want to close our time with turning to God in prayer, and trusting Him for the best outcome in all these situations. Cara, will you start us off?

C: I sure will, Nat. Lord, what a precious gift you are to us. There's a lot of lost people in our lives that we love and that we care about. And I'm just so thankful that you love them even more than we do Lord. That gives me a lot of peace - knowing that you're in charge. Your peace is a precious gift to us, and it's relieving that anxiety of living in this crazy world. And it provides just this awesome assurance for the future, Lord. You're just an awesome Father. And I want everyone to know that's listening, that when they know you and they believe in you - even when this world attempts to shake them, to convince us that you don't care about those people - that they're in your loving care, Lord. And you have this eternal plan that you've made for each one of us, and our hope and our future is in your hands. And that's just such a blessed thought. So I just want to say thank You for that.

A: And dear Heavenly Father, we pray, especially for the churches in this very difficult time, to

know what to do. You've called us to be bold. We want to obey the laws, though, of the land. And yet primarily, we want to obey what you've called us to do, Lord. So I pray that you'll be especially clear to us, as a body of believers in the various churches - not only the churches that we help - but churches across the world, dealing with this tremendous challenge that they're having. So in a special way, Lord, we just pray that you'll guide and direct us, as Christ followers who want to serve you. And especially for the churches that are trying to navigate during these very troubled and difficult times.

N: And Father, we want to thank you for the ministry of Back to the Bible, and what you're doing through it, and you've been so faithful to it for all these years. God, we pray that those who are hearing this message will lean into it, and that they will apply these essentials for prayer - for effective prayer - because I know by talking and hearing from some of them, that this is a great area of confusion and frustration. Father, you know what their needs are, and you know what their prayer requests are. And I pray that you will hear those requests, and that you will give them the perfect answer. Help them to trust you, help us to trust you. In a world that seems to be just falling apart, Father, we know that you are still in control. Your Son is right there by your side, and ready to return. Help us live with intentionality. Help us live like today is our last, like Christ is returning tonight. We pray that those of our friends and family who don't know you, through your Son would come to saving faith. And in all, and above all, no matter what we do, and no matter what we say, that you would be glorified. We ask this all in your Son's name. Amen.